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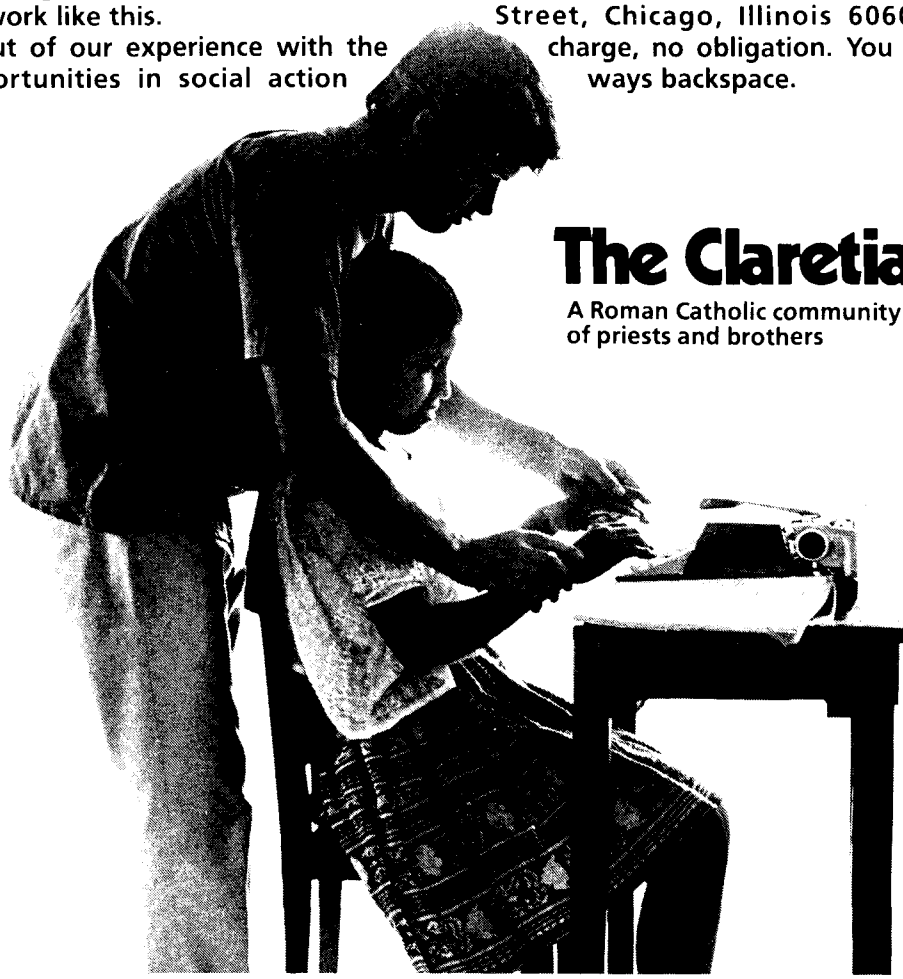

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The Despairing Optimist

RENÉ DUBOS

The present mood among young people on college campuses calls to mind a remark attributed to George Bernard Shaw that I quoted once before in THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR (Autumn 1977). Watching the healthy and prosperous, yet disenchanted, young adults he saw in England during the 1930s, Bernard Shaw remarked, "They've got enough food, sexual freedom, and indoor toilets. Why the deuce aren't they happy?" Today one might add, "They have cars, hi-fi, and the pill." In that issue of the SCHOLAR I cited Shaw's remark in order to contrast joie de vivre with happiness. I shall now try to relate it to the causes of unhappiness in the modern world.

The answer to Shaw's question seems obvious for the campus populations of the late 1970s. Many students—and young faculty as well—are unhappy because they are pessimistic about the prospects for jobs and about their economic future. I empathize with them because I, too, was worried about finding employment when I graduated from the French school system in 1921 during a period of widespread economic depression. I remember the sleepless nights and the gnawing pains from a duodenal ulcer as I tried to find a remunerative and useful place in the social order. My worries about the future ended when I found employment during February 1922 in one of the international agencies located in Rome, but the ulcer has persisted and it constantly reminds me of the anguish associated with the fear of unemployment. I shall return to this topic later because I regard unemployment as the most serious problem of modern societies, even more destructive—paradoxical as it may sound—than nuclear warfare, shortages of resources, and environmental degradation.

The fear of unemployment and concern about the economic future, however, are not the only considerations responsible for the mood of despondency now so prevalent on college campuses. There are many people who are financially independent or who are assured of lucrative jobs who have no zest for life. Their attitude is not necessarily one of panic or of violent hostility to current conditions, but rather one of lassitude and disenchantment.

The scientific culture has often been accused of contributing to unhappiness in the modern world by destroying the certainties which have supported humankind in the past, and especially by making it appear that human life is not as exalted and significant as we used to believe.

Because of the Freudian revolution, it is said, the very concepts of rationality and consciousness have been progressively eroded and are being replaced by the blind determinism symbolized by expressions such as "Chance and Necessity" and "Beyond Freedom and Dignity." We have indeed little reason to be proud of being human if it is true that our behavior is governed, not by rationality, but by "programs" and unconscious forces.

The Darwinian revolution seemingly deprived the human species of its uniqueness among living things. Homo sapiens is said to be not significantly different from the great apes and to be just a tiny glow flickering for a short time in an indifferent corner of the cosmos. Ever since the Copernican revolution, each advance in astronomy has made

✪ RENÉ DUBOS is professor emeritus at the Rockefeller University. His latest books are *The Professor, the Institute, and DNA* and (in French, with Jean Paul Escande) *Chercher: Des médecins, des chercheurs . . . et des hommes.*

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our planet appear as a more and more trivial object among celestial bodies, and this knowledge has led many people to conclude that human life is as inconsequential as the bit of matter on which it is located. It is not much fun to be just one animal among many others after having lived so long in the belief that we are the paragon of animals.

For many people, the sense of pride in being human is incompatible with an awareness of the power of the deterministic forces that influence our behavior and of the immensities of geological time and of astronomical space to which we must relate our lives. No longer supported by the belief that the world around us had been designed for human life, many people, including students and faculty of prestigious schools, try to find intellectual substitutes for the lost certainties in astrology or in mystical doctrines emanating from ancient times and distant places.

Our intellectual images of Humankind, Life, and the Cosmos have thus been unquestionably affected by the scientific culture. Yet I doubt that this has much affected the view that most people have of themselves and of the world. A sophisticated and learned man of Greece or of China twenty-five hundred years ago probably would have had an image of himself and of his relation to the cosmos not qualitatively different from that of academic people in the Western world today. As to the average man in the street, I doubt that he is more concerned with such problems now than was the average citizen before the advent of scientific culture.

Reasonable and thoughtful people have always known, without need of Freud's teachings, that most of their attitudes are affected by obscure signals emanating from dark chambers of their being; but most of them, nevertheless, believe that they can behave rationally when they put their minds to it. Similarly, human beings have always been aware of their kinship to animals, as expressed in ancient fables and medieval bestiaries; but they nevertheless regard themselves as qualitatively different from and superior to all other animals—including the smartest chimpanzees. Sophistication in astronomical matters does not weaken the direct experience of our daily life—that the sun rises in the east and sets in the west. Furthermore, most of us feel very much like Anatole France's little dog which believed that, wherever it was at a given time, this very place was the center of the world.

In my opinion, then, the changes in concepts resulting from the scientific culture have not significantly affected our attitudes and behavior. In contrast, I believe that many aspects of our lives are influenced by changes in certain social structures of the modern world—in the family, for example.

Both in its nuclear and extended forms, the family used to be responsible for the transfer of education and ethical values as well as for many other aspects of socialization. These roles, however, are now increasingly taken over by other social institutions, the result being that there is a corresponding decrease in familial ties and loyalties and that much unhappiness is associated with the loss of these ancient certainties.

All over the Western world, furthermore, there is a tendency for political, economic, and social organizations to become so large and so complex that they can no longer be apprehended by the human mind. People feel like interchangeable cogs in the social megamachine, very much as they feel themselves to be dispensable people in the disposable cubicles of huge housing developments. The most prevalent symptoms of our misery are the sense of helplessness in the face of events that appear beyond our understanding and the feeling of loneliness that comes from the impersonal nature of social relationships. People who cannot be comfortable without certainties—and they are the great majority—are prone to join fringe groups in which they hope to recapture peace of mind and the warmth of close human relationships, even if it requires blind obedience to a leader.

While it is true that we live in a difficult period, idyllic ages of civilization have been rare. Phrases such as "the time is out of joint" and "all coherence gone" entered the language several centuries ago, and many other statements show that each period of history has had its own *Weltschmerz* and *mal du siècle.*

There is nothing new in the belief that one has been born in a calamitous period of history. Consider, for example, the mood of the person who wrote: "The world has grown old and lost its former vigor. . . . the mountains

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are gutted and give less marble, the mines are exhausted and give less silver and gold. . . . the fields lack farmers, the sea sailors." These words fit the mood of contemporary doomsayers but in fact they were written during the third century by Saint Cyprian—at a time some seventeen hundred years ago when the people of the Roman Empire were losing faith in the future of their society. Another dark period was the late tenth century. The vandal invasions and a series of natural disasters had created such an atmosphere of gloom in western Europe that many people believed that the year 1000 would see the end of the world. Barbara Tuchman has shown in *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous Fourteenth Century* that never was so much written about the *miseria* of human life as during the early part of the fourteenth century. This was the time of the black plague and people lived in daily dread not only of pestilence but also of famine, insurrections, and wars. While the Renaissance seems to us a period of unbridled faith in the human condition, its very triumphs caused many scholars to be alarmed about the future. In 1575 the French jurist and philosopher Louis LeRoy published a book in which he expressed his worries about the destructive effects of what were then the new knowledge and the new inventions. His book immediately became popular all over Europe, probably because its mood fitted the anxieties of the period and assuaged the contemporary "future shock." During the post-Napoleonic era, the various European countries expressed once more, each in its own way, a profound disenchantment with the times and with the human condition. Anyone who suffered then from *Weltschmerz* or *mal du siècle* tried to escape from it all into the various forms of romanticism, then later into bohemian life.

History never repeats itself exactly, but the few examples just given suffice to illustrate that periods of doubt and of gloom, with symptoms similar to those we experience now, have repeatedly occurred in the past—in fact whenever and wherever the ways of life have been rapidly disturbed by spurts in general knowledge or by social and technological innovations.

Many phrases have been invented during our own period to express, once again, that "all coherence is gone." Auden's poem "The Age of Anxiety," published in 1947, conveyed that postwar life was haunted by ghosts of undefined but devastating guilt and by a sense of universal shame. Writing in the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* in 1967, James Reston introduced the phrase "new pessimism" to denote the fear resulting from the widespread feeling that many problems of the modern world are caused by scientific technology, yet are not amenable to scientific control. As of now, the "in" phrase for the confusion of our times seems to be "The Age of Uncertainty," used by J. K. Galbraith as the title of his book based on a BBC television program. Until World War I, according to Galbraith, "aristocrats and capitalists had felt secure in their position, and even socialists felt sure in their faith," but these age-old certainties were shaken by the two world wars and by the Great Depression.

Answering a criticism by a Buddhist leader that "The Age of Uncertainty" lacks a central guiding principle, Galbraith recently stated that there could hardly be such a principle because life is a great process, a stream that flows without guidance. In this light, according to him, the best approach to social improvement is to modify social systems stepwise, and more or less empirically, in the hope of moving them in the direction of greater harmony between people, greater well-being, and thereby greater happiness. If these efforts fail, they can be redirected on the basis of experience.

Such an empirical approach to social problems is limited, however, by one fundamental difficulty. In the absence of a philosophical basis—a central guiding principle—human activities tend to become ends in themselves. They proceed on their own course and become increasingly unrelated to general human concerns. Yet most people everywhere long for permanent values that enhance the quality of life. Even while enjoying ephemeral and trivial satisfactions, they want their lives to be organized around certainties that are lasting and important. It is in this sense that a central guiding principle is needed in all human activities. As Galbraith himself stated, "I see no purpose . . . in being an economist as such. It's a very dull way of life. The only purpose of being an economist is to see if you can add somewhat to the current of happiness."

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The uncertainties Galbraith refers to in his book are chiefly in the domain of economics and politics. While these have obviously plagued modern societies, there has also been an increase in certainties with regard to other fundamental aspects of life—in particular with regard to human rights and to environmental quality. Old certainties based on classical value systems have now gained new strength from modern scientific knowledge, as I shall now illustrate with a few examples.

1. In the past, rules of behavior used to be largely derived from the religious and ethical systems prevailing in a community. Now many of these rules are being reinforced by factual scientific information. The biblical teaching that all human beings are descendants of Adam and Eve is, for example, compatible with the scientific fact that we all have the same fundamental genetic constitution. The defense of civil rights, and more recently of fundamental human rights, thus acquires scientific justification from the knowledge that all human beings belong to one well-defined biological species.

2. Our genetic endowment strongly suggests that the human species originated in a semitropical savanna. Surprising as it may sound, all human beings, whatever the color of their skin and wherever they live, are still today biologically adapted to the environmental conditions of the savanna. None of us could long survive in the areas where we have settled—not even in the temperate zone—without manipulating the environment to create the conditions and the resources needed for our existence. Environmentalists find it shocking that the biblical teachings give man dominion over nature, but scientific knowledge leaves no doubt that the persistence of human life implies, in fact, humanization of much of the earth. On the other hand, the teachings of all great religions agree with modern ecological knowledge in recommending that the earth is not to be exploited as a quarry, but used in a spirit of stewardship, with concern for its long-range welfare.

3. Scientific knowledge has confirmed and extended the concept that Homo sapiens can become fully human only by functioning in a human society. All human beings, furthermore, are born with a wide range of potentialities, but these can become expressed only to the extent that their development is permitted and stimulated by the proper environmental conditions. A good environment thus implies not only conditions suitable for the growth and operations of the body but also conditions suitable for the development and expression of mental attributes. The need for a proper occupation in a structured society is the justification for my earlier statement that the problem of unemployment is of crucial importance for our future.

Unemployment is usually considered exclusively as an economic problem, either for the unemployed person or for the community as a whole. Unemployment is, of course, bad economically for the person who is deprived of income, but it may be either bad or good economically for the community depending upon the circumstances—at least if it is true, as some economists claim, that a certain percentage of unemployment contributes to the maintenance of a sound economy.

If economic considerations were the only ones of importance, the bad effects of unemployment could be prevented by giving adequate financial support to unemployed persons, but this is a situation where it is painfully clear that man does not live by bread alone. Providing for adequate food and shelter may be all that is needed by the body machine, but this is not enough to make Homo sapiens function as a real human being. The most distressing aspect of unemployment is that it may cause changes in human life that reach as deeply as desocialization and dehumanization.

In practice, of course, most unemployed people do not tolerate becoming desocialized and dehumanized. If society does not provide them with the opportunity to function in some serious employment, they create or join social structures in which they can have the kinds of activities and relationships that are needed by all human beings. Social planners who recommend a certain percentage of unemployment as an economic necessity thereby implicitly accept that a large percentage of persons who are unemployed for a significant length of time will become part of fringe social groups—as likely as not of gangs that will be antisocial because they attempt to provide a substitute for the functions that normal society has failed to provide.

It is because unemployment is now so

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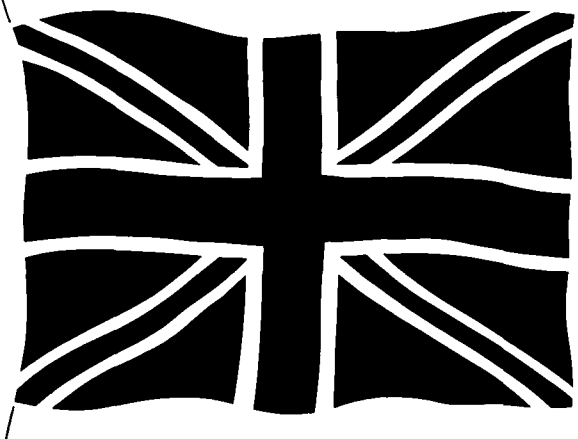

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widespread in the world and so casually accepted as merely an economic problem that I regard it as the worst evil of our times. It is an evil that destroys not things, not abstract values, but essential aspects of humanness in human beings. Since I do not want to end on such a somber note, I shall quote once more a historical situation that may give hope for the future.

In 1933, the city of Chicago held a World's Fair to celebrate its one-hundredth anniversary and the achievements of scientific technology. The organizers of the fair obviously believed that human life would be managed from then on so as to satisfy technological imperatives. This social philosophy was expressed in striking phrases of the guidebook: "Science discovers, genius invents, industry applies, and *man adapts himself to, or is molded by*, new things. . . . Individuals, groups, entire races of men *fall into step* with . . . science and industry" (italics mine). It is my opinion that no one would dare print such statements today. Granted the gross deficiencies of our present industrial practices, the trend is nevertheless to make technology conform better to human nature and to ecological imperatives, rather than the other way around, as was assumed as recently as 1933.

My hope is that unemployment also will eventually come to be considered from the human point of view rather than only the economic and technological. Planners will come to realize that unemployment is much more than a threat to physical well-being because it creates a situation in which the victims have no choice but to accept becoming desocialized or to protect themselves against desocialization by joining groups hostile to normal society. Unemployment is a consequence of a new kind of social and industrial organization to which human beings are not adaptable because it is foreign to their evolutionary past. The opportunity to perform a useful role in the social structure is an essential condition of mental health—one of the inalienable human rights.

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Life and Letters

A Man of Letters

ARISTIDES

My definition of a pessimist is a person who doesn't check his mail. Although with age my illusions about human nature become fewer, my belief that people learn from history slighter, my confidence in youth lesser, nonetheless my feelings about the mail—about *my* mail—remain what they have always been: feelings of complete, utter, and abject hopefulness. When it comes to the mail, I am a Fabian, a lifetime member of the Americans for Democratic Action, a Pollyanna perpetually aglow and atremble with optimism. I love mail, I adore mail, I cannot get enough mail. Saul Bellow, in his latest novel, *Humboldt's Gift*, remarks on his hero's receiving "heavy mail," and that is a phrase which, as the boys and girls in literary criticism nowadays say, resonates with me.

The mail generally arrives in my neighborhood between 11:15 and 11:45 A.M. As will scarcely be surprising, this is one of the high points of my day. The postman, quite heedless of James M. Cain's novel, always rings once. At his ring I stop my work, either reading or writing, usually in mid-sentence. If I am speaking over the telephone when the postman rings, my attention flags. My mind is now on that apartment building mailbox marked "Aristides" and on the small table beneath the mailboxes on which are placed magazines and packages. I walk down the stairs simulating a mien of casualness, though my heart bounds. What is it, exactly, that I expect to find in the day's mail? Notice of a large inheritance? Extravagant praise for my character? Unexpected checks for ample sums? Offers of ambassadorships in countries of gentle climate and stable government? Interesting proposals? Intriguing opportunities? Yes, all these things—and, who knows, perhaps something better.

In reality—now there is one of the coldest phrases in the English language—what generally awaits is a bill from the electric company, another from a dentist, two magazine subscription offers, and a box containing a sample of a new hair spray. Yet where there is mail there is desire, and sometimes there are surprises. Most of these derive from my occupation as a scribbler. Writing in public places makes for strange pen pals. People feel that writers are, somehow, in the public domain, which in a sense they are, and they write to them freely. Any sort of serious letter in response to something he has written is likely to be gratifying to a writer; I know it is to me. I suspect that I get my share of such letters: letters of touching appreciation, of correction, of untrammeled anger. "With all wishes for all kinds of bad luck," one recent correspondent ended a letter of the latter kind, which was positively charming next to the letter of an anonymous admirer that began, "May God castrate you!"

Which brings me to George Santayana's wing chair. Roughly a decade ago I wrote an essay for the *New Republic* about George Santayana, a writer who seemed to me to represent the height of intellectual elegance. The essay appeared in print, and then, some four weeks later, a letter turned up from Austria, forwarded to me from the *New Republic*. I no longer have the letter, but, as I recall, it was written on linen of a quality out of which I should have liked to have a summer suit made. The letter itself opened with a paragraph of carefully measured praise for my essay—praise which spoke of my mental penetration and exquisite sensibility. (Certainly there was nothing here of substance that I would care to argue about.) My correspondent went on to inform me that he had been a student of Santayana's at Harvard, and had been left a number of his personal effects.

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Among these was the philosopher's favorite wing chair. Would I, so clearly an admirer of Santayana, be interested in having it?

I thought a good bit about that wing chair. I set it in different rooms in my home, considered the ethics of having it reupholstered, wondered if it carried any talismanic qualities. Had Santayana written *Dominations and Powers* sitting in that chair? Was it the same chair in which he sat, in the single room provided him by the Hospital of Blue Nuns outside Rome, while making his own abridgment of *The Life of Reason*? Merely to sit in such a chair could not but increase one's powers of ratiocination, subtlety, serenity. Did I want that wing chair? Do graduate students wear jeans? Do South American politicians go in for sunglasses?

I wrote to my correspondent in Austria to thank him, first, for his kind words and, second, for his generous offer. I should myself, I wrote, want to pay the expense of shipping the chair to the United States. He returned my letter by saying that he would foot the shipping costs, which would come out of the eight hundred dollars that he wanted for the chair. Thus ended our correspondence. I could be quite wrong about this, but I imagine him waiting out a month of silence on my end, picking up the current week's *New Republic*, skimming an essay therein on, say, Mark Twain. Then he takes out a sheet of that splendid stationery and writes to its author, saying that, through his mother, who as a young girl had lived two doors down from Samuel and Olivia Clemens in Hartford, he had come into ownership of the favorite wing chair of Mark Twain. . . .

But, it occurs to me now, I may have imagined that Santayana's wing chair was offered to me only because of an authorly twist of pride. Perhaps my correspondent's first paragraph of praise for my writing lulled me into thinking that the remainder of his letter had to do with my reward—as if by writing well about Santayana I really deserved to have his chair. "I find I have enough of the author in me," the young Horace Walpole wrote, "to be extremely susceptible to flattery." As any writer knows, or anyone who has spent much time around writers, when it comes to flattery, compliments, praise generally, Walpole's "extremely susceptible" is putting the case very gently indeed. I have known many writers so extremely susceptible that, by comparison, they make George Jessel seem as modest as Saint Theresa of Lisieux.

The need for praise on the part of writers is probably greater than that of other workers in the arts, if only because writers never get the direct response to their work that composers, visual artists, and performing artists do. Perhaps this is why so many novelists and poets have attempted to write for the stage, where they can hear the laughter, see the tears, palpably feel the tension that their work creates. Writers receive reviews, of course, but these are of books only and hence few and far between; moreover, the reviews, for one reason or another, are likely to be unsatisfactory. Thus, most writers, especially if they do not live in New York, must take their injections of praise, if they are to get any at all, epistolarily.

This need for praise—great, heaping banana-split dishes of it—is not on the whole a thing calculated to remind one of the dignity of mankind. Lest I seem to exempt myself from the need, I had better quickly say that I am not exempt. I do have standards in praise, though they are rickety. I like my praise to be intelligent and, preferably, convincing, delivered by a person who has a respect for precision in language and a strong sense of history. If these qualities are lacking, I'll take it any other way I can. Rarely have I found the praise tendered me to be fulsome, though I do recall one instance where I thought things were getting out of hand. An editor for whom I once did a good deal of writing was hitting a crescendo of praise rather too early in our relationship, I thought; soon he would be comparing my pitiful scribblings with Dante and Homer. (Robert Southey is supposed to have said to a contemporary whose name I cannot recall, "You will be remembered long after Homer is forgot—but not until.") I requested him to cease and desist, and, in lieu of further praise, I asked him to send me a letter, on company stationery, proclaiming me and my writing a force for change in Latin America. This he promptly did, and thenceforth we were able to conduct a seemly editorial relationship, free on his side from the need to lavish further praise.

Sometimes the sunshine of epistolary praise turns into drizzles of oddly angled criticism, or, if not quite criticism, then a reaction quite

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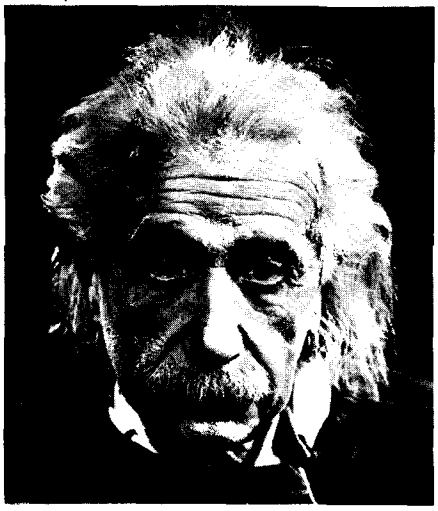

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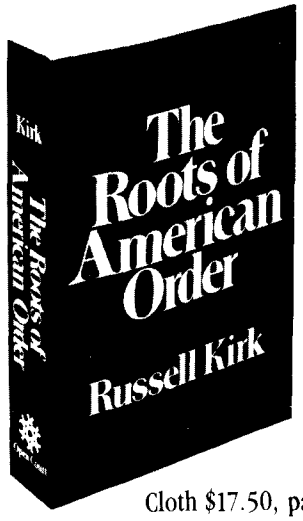

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other than what one had hoped for. In this category of letter I shall not soon forget the response to a segment of a book I wrote which was reprinted in the *Reader's Digest*. The segment had to do with the then new phenomenon of how-to-do-it sex manuals, a phenomenon that I, as an ethical platitudinarian, attacked on grounds aesthetic, psychological, and moral. Some months later, a letter, sent on to me from the *Reader's Digest*, arrived from a faithful subscriber in the Philippines. It read:

> I perused with extreme interest your fine article in current *Readers Digest*, in which you make strong censure on such tomes as *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Sex, The Joy of Sex, New Approaches to Sex in Marriage* by Dr. Eichenlaub, *Sensuous Woman* by J., and studies by Johnson and Masters. What you say is most intriguing. But, may I inquire, do you still possess these above-mentioned tomes? If so, would you send them on to me? I should be more than willing to provide the postage moneys for them. Please answer soonest.

Ah, me, another rainy day in the Republic of Letters.

But what should a perfect delivery of mail contain? This of course will differ from person to person, but for me it would include a letter from an old friend with whom I have been too long out of touch, a letter from someone I love, two letters in airmail envelopes from overseas, a letter containing some found money (an unexpected tax rebate, say, or a reprint fee), a good book that has been long awaited, a letter from someone previously unknown but obviously good-hearted and intelligent, and (finally) a letter informing me that an engagement I had foolishly committed myself to, and that has worried me ever since, has been indefinitely postponed.

What a perfectly dreary mail delivery would contain is easier to imagine. In it would be a letter from the IRS headed "Final Notice Before Seizure," a letter requesting a large loan from an acquaintance to whom all of one's own previous letters have come back stamped "Addressee Unknown," a letter thick with praise from someone certifiably despicable, and a telegram reading "Ignore last wire" when no previous wire has been received. It would also contain invitations that one does not want and that one would, if possible, be willing to expose oneself to certain short-lived yet quite painful tropical diseases to get out of. In "The Adventure of the Noble Bachelor," Conan Doyle has Sherlock Holmes remark to Watson, "Yes, my correspondence has certainly the charm of variety, and the humbler are usually the more interesting. This looks like one of those unwelcome social summons which call upon a man either to be bored or to lie."

I can also do nicely without letters of the tutelary kind Edmund Wilson often used to send to friends. I have recently read two collections of Wilson's letters, *The Nabokov-Wilson Letters* and *Letters on Literature and Politics, 1912-1972*. They are splendid to read, full of literary history and sharp observation, but many of them cannot have been too pleasant to receive. I think here particularly of those letters in which Wilson lectured, upbraided, and generally hectored his contemporaries on their literary shortcomings, a thing he was never loath to do. Not a man long on tact, Edmund Wilson—as, for example, when he wrote to the young Scott Fitzgerald that some lines in a poem Fitzgerald had written "possess a depth and dignity of which I didn't think you capable." A bit near the knuckle, as the English say, but worse, and lengthier, examples are ready to hand. Receiving one of these bee-stinging letters from Wilson must have made a person feel, whatever his age, like Lord Chesterfield's son, forced to take all that instruction and abuse—but without the prospect of one day coming into a title.

No, the better letters carry lighter loads. Madame de Sévigné and Horace Walpole, two of the great letter writers, almost insist upon their lightness. Walpole wrote to one Henry Seymour Conway at the close of a letter: "Well! I have here set you the example of writing nonsense when one has nothing to say, and shall take it ill if you don't keep up the correspondence on the same foot. Adieu!" And Madame de Sévigné, in a letter to the Comte de Bussy, writes: "I know not how you can like my letters; they are written in a style of carelessness, which I feel, without being able to remedy it." Of course, neither Madame de Sévigné nor Walpole is finally light. Both are truly charming and, being considerate, cannot help charming others. They are born letter writers. (Madame de Sévigné

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wrote nothing but letters.) They take short views, living day by day. They are cheerful without being deluded about life. Their wit, their common sense, their perspective, their generosity—all these qualities give their letters a cumulative weight.

Small splendors are the stock in trade of the great letter writers: anecdotes, observations, aperçus. A man named John Chute writes to Walpole about being put on a "temperate diet," which causes Walpole to rejoin with this little disquisition on the roast-beef eating habits of Englishmen:

> Only imagine that I here every day see men, who are mountains of roast beef, and only seem just roughly hewn out into the outlines of human form, like the giant-rock at Pratolino. I shudder when I see them brandish their knives in act to carve, and look on them as savages that devour one another. I should not stare at all more than I do, if yonder Alderman at the lower end of the table was to stick his fork into his neighbor's jolly cheek, and cut a brave slice of brown and fat. Why I'll swear I see no difference between a country gentleman and a sirloin; whenever the first laughs, or the latter is cut, there run out just the same streams of gravy! Indeed, the sirloin does not ask quite so many questions.

The greatest letter writer among Americans, in my view, is easily Justice Holmes. He is one of the few writers who can lift me out of such brief depressions as my withering attention span will allow. Holmes is the one American model of the good life; activist and intellectual both, he was a man of wide interests and absolutely no superficiality. Of late I have been reading his correspondence with Sir Frederick Pollock, the English jurist. While stretches of these letters are taken up with matters legal, from which I am intellectually excluded, this does not in the least put me off. Instead I fall into the rhythm of Holmes's life: his vacations at Beverly Farms, the longer months when the Supreme Court is in session, his reports on his reading, his comments upon the life around him. His style is virile, and he himself is—though one scarcely ever hears the word any more—manly in the most attractive way.

Good letters do not usually submit to the discipline of topic sentences. Thus Walpole, in a letter to George Montagu, writes, "If all the adventures don't conclude as you expect in the beginning of a paragraph, you must not wonder. . . ." Justice Holmes's letters, too, often have this pleasing jumble, this *méli-mélo.* Within the compass of a single paragraph of a letter written in 1928, when he was eighty-eight, Holmes remarks on thesis interpretations of American history of the kind produced by Charles Beard and Vernon Parrington that "belittling arguments often have a force of their own, but you and I believe that high-mindedness is not impossible to man"; that he finds Anita Loos's *But Gentlemen Marry Brunettes* dreary because "sexual talk or innuendo is displeasing from a woman, I think. Perhaps because we know, though the older literary tradition is the other way, that they take less interest in the business than we do"; and ends on yet another of his fresh, comical, yet serious metaphors for death: "Most of the places here now to me are sockets from which the occupants that I knew have been extracted by the final dentist."

In one of their exchanges Holmes and Pollock name those they deem to be literature's great letter writers. Both agree on Horace Walpole. Pollock places Samuel Johnson ahead of Charles Lamb. Holmes mentions Byron; Pollock adds Edward FitzGerald and Walter Raleigh. Neither, though, brings up the name of Justice Holmes's contemporary, Henry James, whose letters were not then as accessible as they have since become. No one surpassed Henry James for writing beautiful letters of condolence. The death of a friend was always the occasion for a moving tribute, in which James provided a celebratory portrait—making, as Leon Edel remarks in his biography of James, "his condolences into a muted epistolary elegy." So fine are these letters, so properly measured and elegantly turned, they seem almost worth dying for.

Initially, of course, the English novel was epistolary in form. Letters play an important part in much of Henry James's fiction, and one of his finest stories, "In the Cage," is about a woman who works in a post-and-telegraph office. James M. Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* is only peripherally about the post; but Albert Halper, in *The Chute,* wrote a novel about workers in a Chicago mail-order house. In *Herzog* Saul Bellow deploys letters brilliantly, having his hero write to historical personages to great comic

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effect: *"Dear Herr Nietzsche—My dear Sir, May I ask a question from the floor?" "Dear Governor Stevenson, Just a word with you, friend."* Many a novel and short story has turned on a letter sent, or discovered, or torn up at the last moment.

Nowadays such epistolary intervention in fiction will not quite do. A question of suspension of disbelief is involved; too few readers would be willing to believe that the decisive letter was actually delivered. I make this judgment on the basis of complaints I hear about postal delivery, which, to put it softly, are manifold. Postal delivery is another of those areas of civilization that give the lie to theories of progress. Currently people of cosmopolitan correspondence claim that the chance of winning in a state lottery is far better than the chance that a letter sent to Italy will reach the person it is addressed to. England once had the finest of all postal systems; fifty years ago a correspondent could send out a letter in the morning and receive an answer by evening. Edward Shils tells a story of a letter from Hungary tersely addressed to him as "Professor Edward Shils, Sociologist, England" reaching him safely at the London School of Economics. This was under the old dispensation; under the new dispensation, English mails seem scarcely better than American. Ours are erratic at best: sometimes a letter will take but a single day to make its way from the Middle West to either coast, whereas another letter will take four days to get across town.

Straining to be understanding (always an effort), I suppose one must partly blame the drop in the quality of postal service on the rise of what is rightly called "junk mail." The postmen's sacks are weighed down annually with some 34 billion pieces of junk mail, or roughly a third of all letters mailed in the United States. Selling through the mails is a brisk business, and there are professional brokers who deal exclusively with compiling and renting mailing lists to various firms and causes. Thus a person who subscribes to one magazine is considered fair game for all. Send in ten dollars to help save the whale, and before the year is out one is certain to be pitched for funds to put an end to the gelding of goldfish. For decades now *The New Yorker* has run, at the bottom of its slender columns, examples of silly opening gambits used in junk mail—under the rubric "Letters We Never Finished Reading." But there have been true advances in this sort of bumpf. A recent letter soliciting a magazine subscription showed up in my mailbox bearing the line "Should you be punished for being born with a high I.Q.?" on the outside of the envelope. A new rubric, clearly, is called for: "Letters We Never Started Reading."

Letters I usually do finish reading are those printed in the letters columns of intellectual magazines. Controversies over some point in scholarship or in politics have an interest that transcends the points that originally gave rise to them; the interest is in seeing intellectuals in extremis, always a gaudy spectacle. Literary widows rush in to protect their husbands against what they deem defamation; disgruntled authors lash back at reviewers; intellectual kibitzers stick in their two cents' worth. Much about the character of an intellectual magazine can be discovered from the letters it prints. If most of them are congratulatory, something is amiss. Disagreement is the true oxygen of these magazines, argument and mental fencing their real exercise, intellectual bloodletting their only physic. Of present day polemicists, I think Professor H. R. Trevor-Roper easily the best, the man most adept at laying a polemical opponent wide open; Noam Chomsky, on the subjects of Southeast Asia and the Middle East, has proved himself far and away the most boring; and the *T.L.S.* the site of the most entertaining of these polemical picnics. The tradition of the polemical letter goes well back, of course. Here, for example, is Oscar Wilde in 1890 in *Truth* magazine, answering Whistler's accusation of plagiarism by simply blowing Whistler off the court:

> I can hardly imagine that the public are in the very smallest degree interested in the shrill shrieks of "Plagiarism" that proceed from time to time out of the lips of silly vanity or incompetent mediocrity.
>
> However, as Mr. James Whistler has had the impertinence to attack me with both venom and vulgarity in your columns, I hope you will allow me to state that the assertions contained in his letters are as deliberately untrue as they are deliberately offensive.
>
> The definition of a disciple as one who has the courage of the opinions of his master is really too old even for Mr. Whistler to be allowed to claim

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it, and as for borrowing Mr. Whistler's ideas about art, the only thoroughly original ideas I have ever heard him express have had reference to his own superiority as a painter over painters greater than himself.

It is a trouble for any gentleman to have to notice the lucubrations of so ill-bred and ignorant a person as Mr. Whistler, but your publication of his insolent letter leaves me no option in the matter.

I have extracted this little lyric of artful nastiness from a recent book entitled *Dear Sir, Drop Dead! Hate Mail Through the Ages,* edited by Donald Carroll (Collier Books). If there are 34 billion pieces of junk mail sent annually, another billion pieces of hate mail may well be aloft during the same period. A great deal of such mail is sent to people who appear on television regularly; politicians get a goodly share; athletes, authors, and others on public view come in for their epistolary abuse. Mr. Carroll remarks that the hate letter is "probably the most popular and enduring genre of folk literature in the world," adding that "it is the only literary form that has always had more practitioners than readers"—this last referring to the fact that most people who receive it throw their hate mail away unread. Although my scribblings have brought me only driblets of hate mail, such specimens of it as I have received I have read sedulously and saved. One day I plan to return each piece of hate mail in my possession to its owner, along with a note that reads:

Sir: Out of the distant and rather dim possibility that my correspondence will one day be made public, I now return your vicious little letter to you. Odious though you may be, I see no reason why your grandchildren should have to be presented with such clear and irrefutable evidence of their forebear's ill-temper and imbecility.

This, though, is rather heavy-handed next to the crisp volley that an impudent letter provoked from Voltaire: "I am seated in the smallest room in the house. I have your letter before me. Soon it will be behind me." H. L. Mencken, a professional controversialist, apparently received enough angry mail to warrant his printing up a postcard that read, "Dear Sir or Madam, You may or may not be right," which can only have left his antagonists purple with frustration.

Angry letters and sweet, Mencken used to answer all mail sent to him on the same day he received it. This is a noble ideal, to which the closest I can come is a weak sigh of aspiration. Alas, one serious drawback about letters is that, in order to get them, one must send some out. When it comes to the mail, I feel it is better to receive than to give. I suspect I am not alone in this view. Paul Horgan, in *Approaches to Writing,* suggests, "a test of characters in fiction: can you imagine how they would write letters?" This may be a good test for characters in fiction, but I know too many people who could not pass it in life.

I have never counted but I think I must write roughly four hundred letters a year. The great majority of them have to do with business; many are little more than notes requesting this or responding to that. Almost all these letters are written in fits and starts, eight or ten at a sitting. Energy for writing letters seems, in my case, to arrive in spurts. I have on a few occasions had secretarial help, but I seem unable to dictate a letter to my own satisfaction, being one of those people who can only think with a pen in hand or a typewriter before them. I often wish it were otherwise. Along with Mencken's promptitude, I wish I could command the oil magnate Calouste Gulbenkian's method of writing letters, as described by Kenneth Clark in the first volume of his memoirs, *Another Part of the Wood:*

"Not an office man, Mr. Clark"; and sure enough he [Gulbenkian] had no office. In summer he did his work in the park of St. Cloud. His secretaries were seated at folding card tables situated in the boscage at intervals of about half a mile. He would trot up and down between them, with two detectives, heavily invisible, padding along in the adjoining path. I sometimes accompanied him in these walks, and his mind moved with such precision that by the time we reached the next card table he was ready to dictate a detailed technical letter.

Not, to be sure, that the Gulbenkian method could ever hope to produce beautiful letters in the style of Walpole or Madame de Sévigné, et alia. It may well be that true literary letters will soon be—if they are not already—a thing of the past. To write loquacious letters filled with news, descriptions, observations, and anecdotes is an activity for which people no longer seem to have the lei-

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sure or the energy—or, perhaps more accurately, the habit. The telephone habit has partly replaced it. Writers, editors, publishers must conduct fully as much, or more, of their business over local and long-distance telephone as by letter. As a result, the literary record of the future figures to be more fragmentary than that of the past. Splendid volumes of collected letters by writers born twenty-five years from now are not easily imagined.

Yet I should not want to write off letters as an antiquated or dead form. Letters remain invaluable for carefully formulated thought, for good humor, for expressions of earnest sympathy. Sentiments that human shyness will not always allow one to convey in conversation—sentiments of gratitude, of apology, of love—can often be more easily conveyed in a letter. Having important or amusing or detailed information in writing, to reflect upon, to reconsider, to reread in tranquillity, remains a fine thing. Who has not carried a gratifying letter around with him for days after he has received it—to read it again at free moments and feel once more something of the pleasure it gave on first reading? Amidst the junk mail and the hate mail and the crank mail, splendid letters continue to be written. The prospect of receiving such letters still causes me to respond eagerly to the postman's ring. So write, as they used to say during the Depression, if you find work.

Dead Neck

SUE STANDING

Salt flakes fleck my skin
after a circumambulation of the island.
The rough beach grass is turning gold.
I borrowed a boat to get here—
this sand spit not more than a mile long
and an eighth-mile wide—close to shore,
but with currents too swift to swim.

Among the terns and sandpipers,
skate cases—sea purses—
scatter like seedpods. The medusae
are white grapes or moonwort,
the barnacles like lichen.

Only a few days are as whole as this,
where a cove becomes the world, trading
down to smaller and smaller forms of life:
every few steps a horseshoe crab gives way
to one more shrunken, more transparent,
until the last can't be told
from the mermaid's fingernails.

SUE STANDING's poems have appeared in *Salmagundi*, *Prairie Schooner*, and *Ploughshares*. She is visiting poet at Wheaton College for 1979/80 and lecturer at Wellesley College.

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Photographs, Images, and Words

WRIGHT MORRIS

IN 1889, IN CUSTER COUNTY, NEBRASKA, a pioneer who had failed at farming had the time to ponder the brave new world around him. What he saw cried for confirmation. In this treeless landscape, blazing with light, a frozen waste over the winter, baked by the sun in the summer, the inhabitants took refuge in sod houses, as other creatures burrowed into holes. These circumstances bred a new breed of people, and made of the pioneer a photographer. Solomon Butcher was one of the first specialists. Taste had not yet decreed nor practice established what was appropriate as a photographic subject. Time was also needed, and much tactful persuasion, to lure these cave dwellers into the open. *Why* they were there would never be visible in the photographs. This overriding question, the first to be asked by those living elsewhere, was of profound interest to Butcher, but not one that he found puzzling. Being one of them he knew its answer, and this knowledge led them to trust him. We call them pioneers, a native breed of visionaries.

This vision is not self-evident in the photographs. We catch glimpses of it in the objects Butcher persuaded some of them to bring from their soddies, their treasured possessions assembled in the manner of a family portrait. A chair with cushions, a bird in its cage, a sewing machine, a Christmas wreath like a branch of the Golden Bough, an elegant foot-pedaled organ, with glistening keys, the music open on the rack, around which the family is gathered. One child will be in the mother's arms, another on the father's knee. In the middle ground, between them and the soddy, perhaps a few cows or pigs, or the team hitched to a wagon, or a valued piece of farm machinery, all set off against the dark mound of the soddy, the black hole of the doorway, the grass on the roof blending with the sea of grass that surrounds it. About this "image" there is nothing candid. It is as posed and considered as a studio portrait.

The inhabitants have come from the house to stand in the pitiless glare of the light. The man is hatless. His face has been blackened by the wind and sun, but his forehead gleams as if scalped. He wears a collarless, clean white shirt; his wife a seldom worn Sunday dress. It was not lost on Butcher that these portraits have the quality of icons. In many

✪ WRIGHT MORRIS, the distinguished writer and photographer, is the author of *Earthly Delights, Unearthly Adornments*, a book of literary criticism. His new novel, *Plains Song*, will be published in January 1980.

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details they resemble crèches appropriate to a Holy Family. On this frontier all possessions are life enhancing, and have their place. The photographer wanted everything in the picture but himself. He had by nature the "photographer's eye," but he did not have his ego. We see in Butcher's work how the eye can function as an invisible part of the image.

Possessed by a similar obsession to record what he saw around him, Eugene Atget had begun to photograph the city of Paris. Both photographers used the camera to confirm what was visible. Each was a part of the life he photographed. In their practice we have examples that clarify some, if not all, current photographic dilemmas—such as what should come first, the photograph or the photographer.

These sod-house inhabitants, with their gaze on the future, did not see themselves as the camera saw them. They did not smile, or mug. They did not wave to the man behind it. For them it was a moment of stopped time in a fevered dream. Can we say that the photographer's "eye" has its origin in this complex awareness of time? A piece of it is captured, but in the blurred image we see that it continues. An awareness of this gives every photograph its poignancy.

Let us imagine a photographers' tour making a field trip to the plains of Nebraska. We will choose a point in time in which we see it flowing in both directions. Nadar will be there, with his portable darkroom, and Diane Arbus with her mini-camera. I would also like Stieglitz to be there, and Weston, as well as Dorothea Lange and Walker Evans, Cecil Beaton and Richard Avedon. They are all met and led by Butcher to a sod house in Custer County, a piece of time in situ. A pioneer and his wife, with their shoeless children and what they have in the way of possessions, are assembled to be "shot" in the yard at the front. Just to one side, but sharing equal billing, is a team of white horses in black harness, hitched to a topless buggy. The sun shines. The light glares. A breeze stirs the grass on the soddy roof. In some of the photographs this grass will appear as a blur. At a signal from Butcher all the photographers begin to work.

Can we say there is something here for everyone? Time itself will prove to be more of a problem than the subject. Nadar is already at work on the archetypal portrait of the American gothic. The pioneer holds a pitchfork. His wife is reluctant to remove the bonnet that shades her face. Weston has turned from the subject to the sea of grass that waves in patterns of light and shade to the horizon. Lange and Evans are at ease with material they have mastered. While waiting for his turn to photograph the woman, Stieglitz contemplates the cloud formations. Cecil Beaton has begun an "arrangement" of the unusual artifacts available,

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while Avedon prepares a backdrop for a few clinical close-ups. The clicking sound that we hear is the camera of Diane Arbus, seated in the buggy, from where she takes candid snaps of the photographers at work. Only Bellocq—if he had come along—would not have troubled to unpack his equipment, looking forward eagerly to Dodge City, Kansas, next stop on the tour.

Among these diverse and contrasting points of view, the intrinsically unifying element is not the subject, but the medium. They are all photographers. What they are taking are photographs. Some seek confirmation, some self-expression, some documentation, a few have in mind revelation; but so long as they use the camera, what they are taking are photographs. On these discordant impressions of the same subject, time will confer a touch of the miraculous.

In 1900, in Manchester, England, on the day the first electric tram service was inaugurated, a photograph was taken to commemorate the event. At the center of the picture, high on its tripod, is a camera, with the photographer standing on a box behind it. Since he is not the one who took the picture, his presence *within* the picture indicates its importance. On the left are the trams, festooned with garlands of flowers; a policeman, with two citizens, walks from the picture toward a troublemaker. On the right, densely packed, is a motley assembly of citizens. The day is sunless. There is industrial smog in the air of the new century. The eyes of the crowd are turned from the scene itself to look toward the photographer outside the picture. A boy in his early teens, a cap cocked on his head, grips his lapels, thrusting his chest forward like a politician at the word of victory. His glance toward the camera is at once assured and self-appraising. Fame has touched him. Unmistakably he says, "Here I am!"

This is but one of numberless thousands of *anonymous* photographs that give us a magical glimpse into the past, a fragment snipped from the film of time. A more sophisticated, self-aware photographer would have been more selective, found a less conventional point of view, and given us his own impression of the event. This might have heightened its drama, its "human" interest, at the expense of what we now feel to be authentic—life mirrored not by ourselves but by life itself.

Impressions dominate our myriad responses, testifying infallibly to our presence, but intrinsic to the photograph is an aura of detachment. However much the artist may feign it, only the photograph, by its nature, is it. We see it most clearly in that genre of photographs we have referred to as anonymous. Cameras took them. In that lies their authenticity. The lad preening himself in the right-hand corner may or may not have caught the eye of the photographer—he catches ours.

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"All the arts," André Bazin wrote, in a statement I consider inexhaustibly ponderable, "are based on the presence of man, only photography derives an advantage from his absence." The camera takes the pictures. The photographer is empowered to enhance or diminish what the camera takes.

Custom has staled our awareness that the photograph is Magic. We see it, but we do not grasp it. It is as commonplace and as mystifying as sight. The first men to intuit its miraculous powers worked in secret, like alchemists, and kept their records in code. In 1832 Nicéphore Niepce, long pregnant with he knew not what, applied himself to giving the unknown an appropriate name. He did this in the hope that it would make familiar what was passing strange, and prove to be an act of possession.

1. Painting by nature herself
2. Copy by nature herself
3. Portrait by nature herself
4. To show nature herself
5. Real nature
6. True copy of nature

His instincts were that whatever it was, it was a *piece* of nature. In this list there is no mention of Niepce as the prime mover, or the creator. It is nature herself he wants to acknowledge. In the fullness of time (as might have been predicted) the camera holder will prove to be less awestruck. Instead of a portrait or a painting by nature *herself*, it will be by the photographer. He will see himself not merely as the picture taker, but increasingly as the picture maker. The results of this deliberate appropriation, as we see it in the photo-secessionist movement, is a notable gain in pictorial interest at the expense of photographic authenticity—that is to say, at the expense of the photograph.

This amounts to a welcome gain at the expense of an irreplaceable loss. Photographers were quick to recognize this imbalance, and set about recouping the losses. The collaboration desired, and achieved, is what is modern in modern photography but present and at ease in much that is old. The recognition of this quality we have enshrined with the word "image." It was not one of the words Nicéphore Niepce had in mind, nor was it in the mind of his generation, being a perceptive and innovative way to relate the picture, the picture maker, and the subject. The *image* that results—if the maker has talent—we recognize as an original object. The recognition of this *image*, now a commonplace, makes an essential, rather than an incidental, distinction between photographs possible. This photo-image claims, with other man-made artifacts, a self-sufficient uniqueness. Rather than a likeness, it has become a thing itself.

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Although the image's presence can be appreciated, it should not be formulated, since in the photograph *time,* even more than taste, influences our impressions and colors our judgments. The explicitly documentary photograph makes the best, and the most, of its warring elements and its reluctance to be judged as a "picture." This conflict between the pictorial and the documentary gives many photographs a dramatic tension that seeks resolution in a "decisive moment." A residue of unresolved elements will often heighten, rather than weaken, the resulting image. The photographs by Van Schaick, Hine, Riis, Evans, Lange, and numberless others are unavoidably more than social comments, and provide us with more than a message. Pictorial elements—we might say happily—both corrupt and enhance the most searing social statement. There is a remnant of the *image* in every documentary, and the leavings of the document in every image. These inherent contradictions distinguish the photograph and need not be resolved.

The camera image differs from all others in the way it resists isolation. The word "bleed," used to describe a photograph printed without margins, accurately conveys the cutting off, the excision, the amputation, of the photograph from its environment. The habit of "framing" pictures accustoms us to what is visually bizarre. *Where* is what is missing? In what mysterious way does it relate to what has been captured? The controlled conditions of studio portraits—the false environment of props and lighting—avoid the hard, bleeding edges and give the illusion of wholeness. There are no severed connections. Within the frame, as W. H. F. Talbot was the first to remark, there is often much that will prove to be new as the photographer ponders what he has done. It is not unusual for a photograph to be inexhaustible.

"At the thought of the eye," Darwin said, "I grow cold all over." And some frisson of this chill—like the motions of plants underwater—should pass along the nerves of those who take, make, and look at photographs. Anything so miraculous is compelled to become commonplace.

This rise in what is perceived, which is a rise in status, has its price. As an image, the photograph is defanged, in a way denatured, and made accessible to art. Photographs that are brutal, obscene, or merely disgusting can be exhibited as images. No one has yet (to my knowledge) mounted an exhibition of the photographs of Belsen and Dachau, but our remarkable appetite for visual sensations makes it not only possible, but inevitable. If the option is open, someone will take it.

As a girl of twelve, Susan Sontag first set eyes on the photographs of Dachau. She speaks of this occasion as one that divided her life into two parts: before this exposure and after. There is no confusion in her mind, or in ours, that she saw photographs, not images. She goes on to observe that to suffer is one thing, but to live with photographic images of suffer-

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ing can be a corrupting experience. It is the "image" that makes this possible, even fashionable. Avedon's dying father challenges the observer to justify his own participation in his dying. The observer's shudder of overexposure attests to the photographs' validity, as well as to his own distressed and embarrassed humanity. Quantities of male and female flesh now attest to the current clichés of liberation. If we feel shame, embarrassment, or disgust, we have the assurance that the image has not obliterated the photograph.

A commercial photographer I know has been taking pictures for more than half a century, ever since he was given his first Brownie. Among the thousands of prints, the tens of thousands of negatives, are the jumbled contents of our life and times. If all others were lost, this archive might well serve as our portrait. But only on rare occasions do these pictures bring to mind the man who took them. There are babies, kittens, old and wrecked cars; proud parents, glowing brides (flesh tones have been heightened, teeth whitened); summer outings, forest murmurs; oversize and undersize vegetables, eggs, and fruit; construction sites, burned and razed buildings, streets and houses, real estate offerings; locomotives, cabooses; pliers, wrenches, and gadgets; hippie weddings, prominent divorces, famous and infamous people; and the war in Korea while he did his stint in the Army. In the context of the new and the ultramodern, some of these photographs are new as tomorrow. The shifting sands of fashion and taste have finally caught up with what he has been doing all his life. But there is no need to mention his name since he is not a "name" photographer.

My friend's passport photos sell for four dollars. Fancy portraits, in a frame, cost more. Cats like him. He is good with pets and children. If something is visible he will take a picture of it. The secret ingredient in all his photographs is time. The passage of time will confer on his archive much that now seems to be lacking. "Look at that!" they will say, whereas now they just look.

I thought of him some months ago when I came on the news that a photograph by Ansel Adams was offered for sale for $15,000. One of a kind, perhaps? Or one of a kind in the hands of a dealer? Considered as Art, photographs are now subject to the fads and practices of the art market. An artificially created rarity is used to sustain or inflate market prices. The dealer who acquires a photographer's negatives is free to control or exploit this market. Since anyone can, and millions do, buy cameras and take pictures, the oversupply will always exceed the market's demand. Although photographic discussion might continue to be fevered, the buying, selling, and speculation in photographs must confine itself to a sampling of what is offered. It is time—before it is talent—

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that confers interest and significance on the photograph, and time cannot be speeded up to the dealer's advantage. If it were sufficiently profitable, most photographers could take or duplicate most photographs. In *Edward Weston: Fifty Years,* his wife Charis Weston wrote:

> The Guggenheim trips were like elaborate treasure hunts, with false clues among the genuine ones. We were always being directed by friends to their own favorite sights, views, or formations. . . . [Weston] knew my eyes were at his service, and that the moment anything with a "Weston" look appeared, I would stop the car and wake him up.

Today there would be little need to wake him. The recognition of a Weston picture could be followed by its taking. There is no trick to it. It is a matter of profit. If Weston-type photographs are profitable, if the market will absorb them, there might be no end to them. What the camera and the chemicals have done for one photographer, they will also do for another. It is a bit early to open this Pandora's box, but it is there and waits on the occasion.

As of the moment, the uses of photography, not to mention the abuses, defy the efforts of critics and scholars to make sensible distinctions. Among the Yoruba of western Nigeria, portrait photography of considerable interest has been integrated into the culture. It had its origin in English colonial examples, but it thrives on, meeting immediate cultural needs. Stephen Sprague, an American photographer, found ten flourishing photographic studios in a town without electricity or running water—facilities important to photographers. Each of the studios featured scenic props that provided an environment for the sitter, and often constituted, in their originality, a piece of constructivist art. To operate his enlarger, one photographer ingeniously employed the headlight of his motorcycle, with the motor running, to provide a source of light. The most striking of these Yoruba portraits, giving the photographs uniqueness, are the portraits of twins, one of whom had died. In this extremity a second photograph of the living twin was substituted, the two images placed side by side. A conscious and skillful effort was made to remove the evidence that they were actually two separate pictures.

In these Yoruba portraits the non-native observer is confronted with images of a complexity and sophistication far beyond the intent of the photographer. How are the mandarin tastes of a few collectors to be applied to the practice of the Yoruba, not to mention examples still to be discovered? It seems inevitable that these unique, one-of-a-kind portraits will find their way to the expanding photographic market. Rarity will be ensured, until it gets around that they bring a price.

To accommodate the growing number of artists, and the multifarious activities now loosely described as art, distinctions necessary to in-

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telligent discussion have been obliterated. In the vast accumulation of conflicting opinion there is one unifying element: all of it is in words. The art work no longer speaks for itself. It is ironic to think, as the words flow, that the photograph was once thought to speak a more concrete, less abstract language. The slogan was that it was better than a thousand words. Thousands upon thousands of words now encumber a quantity of photographs. This flowering of writing about photography, much of it readable, informative, and innovative, is the latest example of the current cultural mania to transform one thing into another, and eventually into words. To *reside* in one thing or another appears to be impossible. On the evidence, the thing itself—the person, the object, the painting, the book, the music, the sunset, the operation—exists primarily as a point of departure, a launching pad from which we take off into an orbit of our own. The more controversial art becomes and the more heat it generates, the more words it requires. These deflections from the things themselves comprehend most of what we call culture. Book reviews, art reviews, movie reviews, sports reviews feed a greater and more ponderable need than does the book, the work of art, the movie, or the sporting event. Greater than our hunger for sensation is the need we feel to know of what it consists. We have read the book, attended the exhibit, seen the movie, and so on, but what they consist of are the images that have been put into words. Photographs, photographs of all things, were once believed to offer a point of resolution. They offered a stop in the flow of time as well as in the endless stream of our responses. The observer looked. The photograph soberly returned his gaze.

All criticism is in the process of becoming a new genre of fiction, as fiction itself seems to be threatened. The overgrazed world of experience, appropriate to the novel, can be reappraised and reexperienced as criticism. In the same way, the overgrazed world of visible artifacts and events can be recreated as verbal images.

In this practice the recognition of some photographs as "works of art" is less an infiltration of art by photography than an appropriation, on the part of art, of photographic authenticity. We see this in current art enthusiasms. Momentarily the abstract is exhausted. Every effort is made to incorporate the actual—the "happening," the materials, including structures and landscapes. The painter's use of the photo-image in his conception accurately parallels the photograph's appropriation as a genre of art. All of this is extrinsic to the photograph itself.

With its rise in status, however, the photograph is "read" rather than merely looked at. Images of interest are scrutinized like poems. Predictably, the verbal scrutiny will prove to be what gives the photograph its image. The "readings" will be as subtle, as filled with insight, as bizarre as the talents of the writer. It is hard to imagine a photograph that Susan

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Sontag could not verbally embellish. Of a W. Eugene Smith photograph, Walker Evans writes: " 'Welsh Miners' is a memorable and improbable feat: a stroke of romantic realism. Something in the picture doubles back on artifice. The miners are in makeup; their pomade is coal dust. The men are actors, their act is in being themselves. The background stage set is a village you know is there in Wales today."

No question, this commentary adds a new dimension to what we see. Perhaps there is something in all photographs that doubles back on artifice. But Evans would also be the first to say it is better that the photograph have no commentary at all than that it appear to be necessary to the picture. The ambiguity that is natural to the photograph lends itself to conflicting interpretations, but if the viewer's first impression is not his own, he may never come to have one that is. In the photograph this is a real loss for an imaginary gain.

In *First and Last,* a collection of 220 Evans photographs from some 20,000 negatives, words are conspicuously absent. There is no foreword or postword. There are no captions or comments beyond the brief remarks on the jacket. It is a clean, handsome, well-lighted book, appropriate to the photographs. The first was taken in New York in 1928, the last at Brighton Pier, England, in 1973. On turning the pages, however, I found that a few words would have been helpful. These are photographs first, before they are "images." We are legitimately curious about where the places are, and whose face it is. This information is neither irrelevant nor distracting. Whenever we come upon a photograph that is not identified or captioned, the first thing we do is look on the back of it for what is not visible in the picture. In Evans's book we need words to clarify what it is we see, and to inhibit much that we might imagine. The two photographs on the jacket are of Evans as a young man, at age twenty-nine, and as an old man, at age seventy-three. I would not have known that without the caption. There is identifying data at the back of the volume printed in type so small it discourages the curious. Words can be as intrusive in their absence as in their presence.

The volume might have been titled *Signs and Portents.* Signs spoke an intimate language to Evans, and I was told by Peter Bunnell that he collected them as objects. The sign and signboard spoke to him as "nature" did not. I first saw an Evans photograph in *Time* magazine: a graveyard of used cars at the side of a road in Pennsylvania. In different accents than it spoke to Evans it also spoke to me. The exact same photograph could be *read* in various ways. What the image maker needs, in all forms of image making, is the confirmation of his own intuitions, and Evans provided me, as he did numerous others, with this reassuring shock of recognition. An Evans photograph mattered to all of us.

Some of Evans's photographs are familiar to people who couldn't

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care less who took them: the portraits in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, the passport-size mosaic of faces crowding the frame of a studio window, a couple on the boardwalk at Coney Island. Evans also worked, for a limited time, for Roy Stryker's Farm Security Administration program, and his "images" will never be free of the aura of the depression. Nor will the photographs themselves ever resolve or clarify their conflicting impressions. A field of junked cars, a man in faded overalls, children in rags, a row of unpainted houses, an unshaved farmhand do not speak to Americans of human realities but of social conditions to be remedied. When the conditions *are* remedied, they are remarkably less photogenic. There is a conflict of imagery in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, where the words soar into the empyrean, but the photographs, happily, remain earthbound. To that extent, the counterpoint is more fruitful than if the words and images were on the same plane.

The great depression was real enough in itself, but the hold it still has on our imagination is largely a photographic triumph. These images of hardship, of poverty, of human endurance impose on the recent fiction of history a reality that words can do little to modify or displace. As young photographers have learned, the old and battered, the ugly and depressed are much more photogenic than the new and affluent. Hard times are usually good times for photographers. This aesthetic is rooted in American experience and testifies to our hunger for what is "real," a word that vibrates in our consciousness more persistently than the word "truth." Photography, indeed, is such an American institution that it is difficult to believe we did not invent it. First and last, the photographs of Walker Evans have helped shape our image of what is real, and as this image hardens to a cliché, it now obstructs the emergence of what is actually there. Much of what is there is now unseen in photographs that resemble other photographs.

In Michael Lesy's *Real Life: Louisville in the Twenties*, we will find the archetypal urban photographs for those taken by Evans and others in the thirties, through Weegee, Frank, and Diane Arbus in the sixties. The urban scene, for all its vast complexity, provides a limited number of *images*. Time will determine what we see of "interest" in them. Each of these photographs, more than the photographer or the time-bound observer, *sees*. Compared with the photographer's eye, the camera's eye is Olympian, and provides us—if we can bear it—with our first glimpses from space.

On the jacket of John Szarkowski's *The Photographer's Eye*, a volume of select photographs and well-seasoned comments, there is an anonymous photograph of a bedroom interior at the turn of the century. It is rich with those details we consider revealing, including an optician's chart on the back of the door. The *image* is crisply framed, the point of

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view as assured as a photograph of Evans, or one of my own. I recognize with a shock that this anonymous photographer was seeing through my eyes, and I through his. The similarities of all photographs are greater than their real or imagined differences.

In Walker Evans's book there are no words; in Susan Sontag's *On Photography* there are no photographs. This bizarre polarity comprehends the current photographic scene, where picture taking and making is giving way to analysis and stocktaking. Many young photographers have found themselves more gifted with words than with the camera. In determining what and where photography is at, words are more in the ascendant than photographs. The photograph, after all, is just a photograph. Words will determine its meaning and status. Feverishly self-aware, photography now ponders its many selves. As John Szarkowski has commented, the role of the professional has diminished; the personal and the private has expanded. He sees the view as that of the mirror and the window. This is a useful verbal distinction that enshrines the photographer, not the photograph. Mirror, window, or wall, the photograph exists; it is a piece of the world's substance, and it is more than the source of our self-serving impressions. The true photograph confronts us with all the ambiguities of life itself.

The absence of photographs from Miss Sontag's book is a well-considered decision. Both the writer and the reader are more at home with words. Once an activity of any kind reaches the level of public interest and acceptance, it will undergo this transformation. To *get into words* is the ultimate of critical absorption and appreciation. The breadth and depth of our awareness of photography can be gauged by the absence of photographs in a book on the subject. What we want, and what we get, are words. The photographs themselves—like the books, the art, the movies, the events—would complicate and impede the discussion. After all, we still do not know *what* a photograph is.

I assume it is a cultural, not a human, aberration that makes it impossible for us to *reside* in, to be at rest with, an image. Not long ago we may have thought, as some still do, that the invention of the photograph would remedy this tiresome situation. Yet we now find that photographs dissolve into words as readily as dreams do. What is it that forbids us from residing in what we *see*? Is it the fear that what we see, what we actually see, might be all there is? At this impasse a voice cries "God forbid!" and we turn with relief to our discussion.

It might prove to be a global, even a cosmic, dilemma, as the satellites send back their photographs from space. Just as we cannot accept the photographs of Dachau and Belsen, we cannot *grasp* the image of planet Earth rising on the moon's horizon. There it floats (there we float, that is), chilling and awesome, instinct with the terrors of the first human

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nightmares. From the first, the gift of sight has been the seedbed of our illusions. The photograph both confirms and mocks us. That's how it is. But *what* it is cannot be photographed.

Our inability to grasp what a photograph is contributes to its emergence as a "work of art." We don't know what that is, either, but in the context of art we can label and discuss it. Even better, we can wheel and deal with it. It occurs to me, however, that an alternative scenario may now be in the making. Perhaps it will prove to be to the advantage of art to adopt the mass market of photography, where the picture made by the camera can be appropriated as one's own.

If Miss Sontag can be faulted in her performance, it lies in the nature of words themselves. How they do go on and on. If the good writer is entitled to be carried away—and Miss Sontag is so entitled—there is still the problem of the benumbed and bedazzled reader. Her facility is intimidating. Numberless photographs, objects, and opinions come out of her hopper with a uniform texture. Words accumulate to bury words, as images accumulate to bury pictures. In conversation there are pauses where what is questionable, or ponderable, can be tempered with a silence or a rebuttal. It is to the reader's disadvantage, curiously, that Miss Sontag lacks or conceals the prejudices of a picture taker. Names, images, and associations enrich and confuse our impressions. What is she saying? She is saying what she has said. Like many good books, *On Photography* justifies more rereadings than it will receive. Ignored, if not forgotten, in this performance is the fact that the photograph was once empowered to deal with impressions that words cannot: the ineluctably visible, eye- and mind-boggling world. This image is there before words, even as words strain to create a new image. It seems apparent that a frailty in our word-bound culture compels us to reduce *everything* to words. Photography's unique contribution, the mirrored image of actuality, proves to be, like life itself, merely a point of departure for further speculation. If all we can do is *look* at something, perhaps we would rather not look at it at all. The ultimate inhibition would be to see no more, and no less, than what the camera eye sees.

I find it strange, however, to hear Miss Sontag say, "The main difference between painting and photography in the matter of portraiture still holds. Paintings invariably sum up: photographs usually do not."

Great portraits may well sum up the painter, but they seldom sum up the sitter. What photographs usually do, more than anything else, is authenticate personal appearance and existence. Authentication, not enlargement or interpretation, is what we want. This is sufficient to explain the sudden decline in portrait painting since the first daguerreotype. Manet's portrait of Clemenceau is a painting before it is a portrait, in which "characteristics" have been obliterated. The same is true of Picasso's

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Stein. The painted portrait neither has nor will displace the photographs by Cameron, Nadar, Hill and Adamson, Southworth and Hawes as well as numberless, often nameless, others. What would we give for a few fair-to-middling album snapshots of Achilles, or Helen of Troy, or Potiphar's wife, or Attila the Hun, or the Wife of Bath, or any human countenance once part of the faceless past? Whose portrait of Lincoln would we prefer to those left us by Brady and Gardner? The sitter might well like to be flattered, but the observer craves reality. In portraiture, once the photograph existed, authenticity takes precedence over talent, and the decline of the painted portrait can be dated from the first one taken by Daguerre. The photo likeness is a piece of nature, like the subject itself.

Puzzlement as to what a photograph actually is still handicaps both photographers and observers. No theory or aesthetic adequately comprehends the ever widening spectrum of photographic practice, but the discreet use of the word "image" makes essential distinctions possible. An image is what some photographers are after, and we experience their delight when they get it. Rather than another likeness, it has become a thing itself.

It is appropriate that these new images take their place among the objects we value, since they both reveal and enhance our shared awareness of the visible world around us and the invisible world within us. Those photographs that combine the impersonality of the camera eye with the persona of the camera holder will usually commingle the best of these hard-to-reconcile elements. While we continue to grope, like Niepce, for the precise words to capture what a photograph is, we should also acknowledge that the highest praise may be found in the way it eludes us. The ultimate triumph will be to recognize the photograph for what it is.

The most remarkable photographs of our time mirror and probe the macrocosm around us and the microcosm within us, and if a new human is to emerge on this planet, some such image will provide one of its icons, a confirmation of the wonder and the shudder of terror that signal an expanding consciousness. We sense in it, and we fear, the necessary destructive element. What it has in mind for us may not be what we have in mind for ourselves.

In the sea of photographs that now surround us, and increasingly threaten to engulf us, photography might be likened to the glow of phosphorous where the ship's prow splits the water. Thanks to it, we do see more than the surface. Thanks to it, we do not see more than is there. Not to see more than is there, we learn from photographs, is to see more than enough.

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Having No Ear

DONALD DAVIE

Having no ear, I hear
And do not hear the piano-tuner ping,
Ping, ping one string beneath me here, where I
Ping-ping one string of Caroline English to
Tell if Edward Taylor tells
The truth, or no.

Dear God, such gratitude
As I owe thee, for giving, in default
Of a true ear or of true holiness,
This trained and special gift of knowing when
Religious poets speak themselves to God,
And when, to men.

The preternatural! I know it when
This perfect stranger—angel-artisan—
Knows how to edge our English Upright through
Approximations back to rectitude,
Wooing it back through quarter-tone
On quarter-tone, to true.

Mystical? I abjure the word, for if
Such faculty is known and recognized
As may tell sharp from flat, and both from true,
And I lack that capacity, can I say
That Edward Taylor's Paradise was seen
By other light than day?

✪ DONALD DAVIE, professor of English at Vanderbilt University, is the author of *Articulate Energy*. His *Collected Poems* was published in 1972.

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Mysterious Britain

AMY CLAMPITT

That gray morning I left you asleep
in the room overlooking Agincourt
Square, with the statue of King Harry
of Monmouth, and caught the bus to Trellech—
there being just one bus daily, and that one
so early there was no place to have breakfast
but a counter where regulars traded a patter
I couldn't make head or tail of—I was on the
scent of something a whole lot older
than Monmouth or the Battle of Agincourt:
the Wales of the Little People, a whiff
of huge unaccountable forces those
who are into the Craft believe they've
gotten in touch with.
The bus—I was
its only passenger—wound upward
through beechwoods dazzling with holly
over a foot-thick purple carpet of
bluebells. Trellech was at the top,
overhung by a towering wizard's hat
of a spire: too wet a place (even in
hospitable Wales) to be quite friendly.
The Standing Stones I'd come thinking
would leap at me were so hard to find
I began to think somebody'd moved them.
But in fact they were where they'd
always been—lichened, leaning every
which way, in what was now a cowpasture.
Supposedly anyone coming too close, or with
unseemly intent, will be thrown back by

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powerful oracular forces. Whether it's
true or not I can't say, I couldn't
get close enough because of the cows:
big Herefords, mythic nostrils
the size of caves, totem faces and
enormous rimmy eyelashes a frightful,
milk-curdling white. I know cows
just enough to tell these weren't friendly.

There's a so-called Virtuous Well at
Trellech, clearly marked and such a cinch
to find, my guess is it's lost its virtue.
I'd intended to go back on foot,
get involved with holly and bluebells
if nothing else. But before I'd walked very far,
one of the hospitable Welsh came along in a
red sports car and offered me a lift.
There are some things, it seems,
you just can't get close to.

✪ AMY CLAMPITT's poetry has appeared in the *Atlantic*, *Antaeus*, and *The New Yorker*. She is the author of *Multitudes, Multitudes*.

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Art and Science

VICTOR F. WEISSKOPF

Space Is Blue

WHAT COULD BE MORE DIFFERENT THAN SCIENCE AND ART? The former is considered as a rational, objective, and cool study of nature; the latter is often regarded as a subjective, irrational outburst of feelings and emotions. One may also consider scientific discoveries as the products of imagination, of sparks of sudden insight, whereas art could be viewed as the product of painstaking work, carefully adding one part to the other by a rational thinking process. Surely art and science have something in common: both are ways to deal with our experiences and to lift our spirits from daily drudgery to universal values. But the roles of art and science in society certainly are very different. Science, unfortunately, is a closed book for most people outside the scientific community; its influence on society, however, is decisive in two ways. One is via science-based technology; the other is via the philosophical implications of scientific insights which, as it is often wrongly asserted, support a materialistic, rationalistic view of the world around and within us. The role of art is not so easy to define. It does, or should, contribute to a deeper appreciation of our existence and should help us to endure the human predicament. Unfortunately, much of contemporary art is also a closed book to a large majority.

Let us start with the diversity of human experiences and the diversity of what we are doing with them. There are outer and inner experiences, rational and irrational ones, social experiences between two or many human beings, and experiences with the nonhuman part of nature. Our reactions to these experiences are manifold and varied. We think and ponder about them; we make use of them to improve our lives and to avoid material and emotional hardships; we are oppressed or elated by them; we feel sadness and joy, love and hate. We are urged to act, to communicate them to others; we try to relate them to the pattern of our lives. We want to influence people and our environment. All this is the raw mate-

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rial of human creativity. What are its manifestations?

The creative spirit deals with our experiences and shapes them into various forms: the myths, the religions, the philosophies, the diverse arts and literatures, architecture, the sciences, medicine and technology, and social structures. These manifestations are directed toward many aims, practical and spiritual; their actual effects upon humankind are sometimes positive and constructive, sometimes negative and destructive, often without much relation to what the creators intended.

Most forms of human creativity have one aspect in common: the attempt to give some sense to the various impressions, emotions, experiences, and actions that fill our lives, and thereby to give some meaning and value to our existence. Meaning and sense are words difficult to define but easy to grasp. We cannot live without meaning—oh, yes, we can, but life is empty, cold, and "meaningless." The crisis of our time in the Western world is that search for meaning has become meaningless for so many of us.

The different forms of human creativity often seem to be incommensurable, mutually exclusive, or even contradictory. I believe, however, that a better word is *complementary,* a term that has acquired a more focused significance since its use by Niels Bohr. My main purpose here will be to point out the complementarity, in Bohr's sense, between the different avenues of human creativity—in particular between the arts and the sciences. Even within physics itself, we deal with concepts and discourses that on the surface are contradictory and mutually exclusive, but on a deeper level they are what Bohr aptly has called complementary. They represent different aspects of reality, one aspect excluding the other, yet each adding to our understanding of the phenomenon as a whole. The quantum state of an atom evanesces when it is observed by a sharp instrument designed to locate the electron. The state is restituted when the atom is left alone and given enough time to return to its original form. Both aspects—quantum state and location—are complementary to each other; they are necessary concepts to provide a full insight into atomic reality.

Similar complementarities appear in all fields of human cognition, as Bohr often pointed out. They have to do with the question of relevance. In the atom, the wave picture (quantum state) is relevant for certain aspects of its reality, the particle picture for others. There are different ways of perceiving a situation, ways which may seem unconnected or even contradictory, but they are necessary for understanding the situation in its totality. A simple example may suffice for the moment. A waterfall may be an object of scientific study, in which case the velocity distribution and the size of the droplets and their electric charge are relevant; or it may be the object of a poem describing the beauty of the

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phenomenon in which very different properties become relevant. Consider that well-known conversation between Felix Bloch and Werner Heisenberg about the subject of space. Bloch was reporting to Heisenberg some new ideas about the relevance of certain mathematical structures of space when Heisenberg, his mind drifting into other avenues of experience, exclaimed, "Space is blue and birds are flying in it!"

The Holistic Approach

We face a world of many dimensions and infinitudes, of which the world of the natural sciences is only a subdivision. The separation of the natural world outside ourselves from the internal world of the mind is an ever-recurring problem of philosophy and subject to questions and doubts.

It should be emphasized, however, that modern quantum mechanics should not be considered as a source of such doubts. Complementarity within physics does not establish a direct relation between mind and matter. The influence of the observer upon the observed, which is often correctly quoted as the basic tenet of quantum mechanics, plays an important role only for the purpose of defining the concepts that are used for the description of atomic phenomena, such as position or speed of an electron in an atom. The actual phenomena, however, are independent of the observer. In most cases we are not interested in the exact position or speed of an electron; hence we do not attempt to localize an electron or to determine its speed. For example, when quantum mechanics describes the light emitted by an electrical discharge in a gas, or the properties of a metal, we do not interfere with the quantum states of the object. How could quantum mechanics be so successful for an understanding of what is going on in the stars, where any direct influence on the object is certainly excluded?

Natural science, of course, is built upon some kind of separation of the external from the internal world; it regards the objects of its study as distinct and independent from the emotions and ideas that permeate the inner self. But science is a relatively new creation of the human intellect. Before its appearance, the approach to human experience was essentially holistic. Myths, religions, and philosophies tried to derive the totality of human experience, external and internal, from one leading principle and thus to provide it with a well-defined meaning.

Art has always played an essential part in this holistic approach. It was to a large extent a servant of myth, religion, and philosophy, being a most suitable instrument to transmit holistic thoughts and emotions by transforming them into concrete visible or audible entities. Think of Greek sculpture, of Homer's poetry, of the Gothic cathedrals, of Bach's

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Passions. There they stand, the works of art, representing ideas and symbols immediately and directly, with all their spirit and power. They impose upon any beholder their meaning and their general validity, their grandeur and beauty—if the beholder is part of the human soil from which the myths or religions grew.

It is often said that another source of art exists: the immediate urge to embellish and decorate objects of special value and significance. There is not much difference between this and the intensification of symbols and ideas. The embellished objects are symbols that art renders significant; they acquire a meaning beyond their ordinary role through decoration and embellishment.

Whenever the mythologic and religious fervor begins to weaken, art tends to separate from these realms and acquire an independent role, replacing myth and religion to an increasing extent. It continues to create realization of ideas and emotions that are important and significant in the culture of the time, although they may no longer be derived from a myth or a religion. Then it is art that serves as a powerful synthesizer of human experiences of the day, presenting to us messages of joy or sadness, greatness or meanness, beauty or terror, salvation or torture that cannot be transmitted in any other way. Two periods of separation between art and religion are well known: one is that of Hellenistic-Roman art; the other is our own period, which started in the Renaissance and in modern times has resulted in an almost complete separation.

Art, just like myth and religion, is a holistic approach to human experience. Every true work of art transforms and molds a complex of many varied impressions, ideas, or emotions into one unique entity; it compresses a great variety of internal or external perceptions into a single creation. It expresses a whole truth—if this word may be applied here—and not a partial one or an approximation to the truth. If it is a great work of art, it cannot be improved or changed or redone in order to comply with new insights that were not taken into account in the first creation. It is an organic whole that says what it says in its own special way. At different epochs it may mean different things to the beholder or listener or reader. It will be interpreted in different ways; it may have more meaning at one period and less at another. It may mean different things to different groups of people. But it is valid and effective only in its original form.

The Scientific World View

The tradition of holistic approach to the totality of human experience suffered an important change with the birth of natural science in the Renaissance. A new era began. Instead of reaching for the whole

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truth, people began to ask limited questions in regard to the natural world. They did not ask questions such as, What is matter? What is life? What is the nature of the universe? Instead they asked, How does the water flow in a tube? How does a stone fall to the earth? What makes the blood flow through the veins? What happens if you rub two objects against each other? The general questions were shunned in favor of the investigation of separable phenomena, where it was easier to get direct and unambiguous results.

Then the great miracle happened. By the systematic study of many detailed phenomena whose relevance was not obvious at all at the start, some fundamental insights into the basic structure of nature emerged. The renunciation of immediate contact with absolute truth, the detour through the diversity of experience paid off. The restraint was rewarded as the answers to limited questions became more and more general. The study of moving bodies led to celestial mechanics and an understanding of the universality of the gravitational law. The study of friction and of gases led to the general laws of thermodynamics. The study of the twists of frog muscles and of voltaic cells led to the laws of electricity that were found to be the basis of the structure of matter. Some sensible answers emerged to those holistic questions that were shunned at the beginning. The nonholistic approach led to holistic results. As Einstein said once, "The eternally incomprehensible fact about the world is its comprehensibility."

The holistic character of scientific insights differs greatly in character from that of myth, religion, and art. First of all, it does not directly include what we commonly refer to as the human soul, our feelings of awe or desolation, our ambitions, our convictions of right or wrong. It includes only the physiological phenomena accompanying these realities. The holistic character refers to the unity of natural phenomena outside our "souls." Furthermore, and equally characteristic, the scientific insights are always tentative, open to improvement and changes; they have a restricted validity. They appear as incomplete perceptions of parts of a greater truth hidden in the plenitude of phenomena, a truth that is slowly but steadily revealed to us. Every step toward more insight adds to the value of previous steps. The scientific creations do not stand, each by itself, as works of art; they cannot be regarded as separable entities. They are parts of a single edifice that is collectively assembled by scientists and whose significance and power is based upon the totality of contributions. In German this is referred to by the untranslatable term "Das 'Weltbild' der Naturwissenschaften." Newton said, "I stand on the shoulders of giants." His work, like that of Einstein and other great scientists, comprises only a few stones of this edifice—albeit rather large ones at pivotal locations.

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The Complementarity of Art and Science

Both art and science are here to give us deeper insights into our environment. But this environment is not at all the same. For science (only natural sciences are considered here) it is the natural world in which we live, including our own body and brain. For art, it also contains the natural world, albeit in a different way (remember Heisenberg's space), but it mostly consists of the vast realm of personal ideas, feelings, emotions, reactions, moods, attitudes, and relations between human beings. One might object to this and assert that all these elements are also subject to a scientific approach as phenomena within our brain. This is certainly true, but, just as science approaches external natural events in a thoroughly different way than art, so does it approach the internal landscape of what we may call our souls.

This difference has very much in common with Niels Bohr's complementarity. There are several contradictory, mutually exclusive approaches to reality. The scientific approach to a phenomenon is complementary to the artistic approach. The artistic experience evanesces when the phenomena are scientifically explored, just as the quantum state is temporarily destroyed when the position of the particle is observed. We cannot at the same time experience the artistic content of a Beethoven sonata and also worry about the neurophysiological processes in our brains. But we can shift from one to the other.

Both aspects are necessary to get at the full reality of the phenomenon. We can admire the starry sky by being overwhelmed by the vastness and variety of star patterns or by contemplating the physical nature of the stars and star systems, their motions and their developments from the "big bang" to their present stage. We can be impressed by a clear sunset because of the beautiful blending of colors or because of some thoughts connected with this symbol of the end of a day in human life; but we can also be impressed by the processes of refraction and scattering of light in the atmosphere by suspended particulate matter.

The contrast between those different approaches is not necessarily the one between rational thinking and emotional feeling; one can and does talk rationally about emotional impressions and about music, painting, or other arts. Yet it is a very different type of discourse—lucid and concise within its own intrinsic scale of values, but fragile and indefinite when judged by the peculiar requirements of scientific intercourse. One view complements the other, and we must use all of them in order to get a full experience of life. In particular, as a scientist one may be aware of this need, since his or her professional life is rather one-sided: "In the morning I go from mystery to reality; in the evening from reality to mystery." But mystery is another form of reality. No wonder so many scien-

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tists are actively or passively interested in music, the most irrational of the arts.

The vast difference or complementarity ought to be so obvious to anybody who has to do with art and science that it should need no further comment. But there exists a subgroup of scientists who do not subscribe to this statement. Let us call them the "science chauvinists." They maintain that the progress of neurophysiology and brain science will finally lead to an adequate scientific understanding of what is going on in our brain when we create or enjoy a work of art, or when we are spiritually elevated by art or religion so as to sense a deeper meaning in it. Going one step further—now the subgroup becomes noticeably smaller—they maintain that we then may be able scientifically to create art or replace it by certain nerve stimulations since we then would know what its neurological function is.

The notion of a scientific insight into the essence of art is based on a number of fallacies. True, there is no imaginable limit to our understanding of brain action and of the identification of definite nerve-processes with emotional, moral, or aesthetic thoughts or feelings. We may expect tremendous progress in this field of science within a few decades. But there are several reasons why there seems to be a definite limit to fundamental scientific understanding of such matters. One reason has to do with the fact that any scientific research is based upon reproducibility of results. Certain phenomena in our souls that are relevant to the arts are not reproducible. Not only has every human being a different set of genes; more important, he or she has been subject to a different set of impressions. Some of these differences may be considered as irrelevant in certain respects—for example, a medical doctor will treat a disease successfully by the same methods, whether the patient be an Einstein or a half-wit. But for the development of human culture and traditions the differences become most relevant. Human culture is an amplifier for both the genetic differences and those acquired by experience. A nonrecurring unique combination of such differences makes an artist or poet capable of creating a work of art. It also determines the unique way in which an individual experiences that work of art. How can such a process be scientifically analyzed when it occurs only once? Do we not face here a typical complementary situation between the structure of the nervous system on the one side and the creation and perception of a work of art on the other? Indeed, does not the specific uniqueness of a work of art represent a fundamental obstacle to the application of scientific analysis to the creative and perceptive process?

The same problem also appears in the social sciences. Nonrecurring and unique events occur frequently in the minds of human beings; they have decisive influences upon the social fabric of society because of the

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amplifier effect of human culture. This may turn out to be a serious impediment to reliable scientific predictions in the social sciences; it may also be a fundamental difficulty when animal sociobiology is applied to human societies.

I must confess that I may run into the same error that Niels Bohr committed when, some time ago, he argued that the processes of life are complementary to physics and chemistry. He based his conclusion upon the fact that a strict chemical analysis of life processes requires the death of the investigated creature. Therefore he considered it possible that matter which is alive may represent a different state of matter, complementary to the nonliving state, in analogy to the atomic quantum state which is destroyed by an attempt to look at its detailed structure. He was wrong—as the discovery of DNA and all that followed have clearly shown. I do not think that I commit a similar error, but if I do I am in good company. I believe there are fundamental differences between art and science which cannot be bridged over, just as no new physical theory will ever get rid of wave-particle complementarity.

Art and science have this in common—they provide meaning and sense to human experience. But the sense of the meaning is thoroughly different. It has been observed that art transforms general experiences into a single and unique form, whereas science transforms detailed single experiences into a general form. Either of the two transformations results in a holistic product: the work of art and the law of nature. But there are vast differences between the two. We have already mentioned the tentative and unfinished character of our scientific perception of nature. It represents only part of a truth that is developed step by step, whereas a work of art is finished and transmits its full message at all times, although the message may not be always interpreted in the same way.

An important difference between art and science comes from the collective character of the scientific "Weltbild." Even the most impressive single scientific creation makes sense only within the web of other contributions. Surely the significance of a work of art also depends to some extent upon what has been created before. Beethoven could not have composed his music without the framework of Bach, Haydn, and Mozart. Michelangelo's art builds upon the development of Greek art and of the early Renaissance. We understand a work of art much better when it is considered within the cultural framework of its time. But this dependence is much more tenuous and different in character. The interdependence between scientific creations is such that individual contributions have no significance whatsoever in isolation. They are bricks in a common edifice, and it is the edifice that corresponds to a work of art and not the individual bricks.

The concept of a scientific edifice points to a characteristic differ-

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ence between art and science. There exists something that may be called scientific progress. We definitely know and understand more today than we did before. Einstein's theory of gravity is nearer to the "truth" than Newton's. If Newton were alive today he would freely, and probably enthusiastically, admit that Einstein's theory is an advance compared to his (a statement which is hard to prove; nevertheless it is a convincing one for every scientist). The concept of scientific progress is tied to the idea of a scientific edifice to which every scientist contributes, an edifice which definitely is larger today than it was before. No such progress can be found in art. There is no reason why a Gothic sculpture should be considered better than a Romanesque one, or why Rafael represents an advance compared to early medieval art, or Mahler compared to Mozart. True enough, there is a tendency of increased sophistication in art as time proceeds. The means of expression become more manifold, varied, and intricate. Of course, a similar tendency exists in the sciences. In the latter case, however, it is connected with a genuine increase of insight into, and understanding of, nature. The increased sophistication of art may have led to a wider scope of subject matter and a greater variety of creative forms but hardly to a more powerful force of artistic expression.

The collective character of science leads to another typical difference between a work of art and a law of nature. The presentation of the latter is not bound to the formulation given it by the creator. On the contrary, the very essence of a natural law elevates it far beyond any personal formulation. Nobody but a historian of science is interested in how Maxwell formulated his equations. Their significance is much better understood from later, more comprehensive presentations. The uniqueness of a work of art is a notion completely different from the uniqueness of a law of nature. The work of art represents a personal entity which is transmitted to, and reexperienced by, other individuals as a personal experience. The law of nature is an impersonal entity, an abstraction from a multitude of specific direct or vicarious experiences and creative ideas of many individuals; it is understood by other individuals as an impersonal general intellectual entity. The work of art produces in the recipients feelings of joy, sadness, spiritual elevation, or tragic dejection that are an essential part of the message. The insight into a law of nature also produces feelings and emotions, such as awe, joy of insight, satisfaction, and the like. But they are not an essential part of the message.

It is often said that the role of intuition is a common factor in art and science. Rarely is any advance made in science without an intuitive perception of some idea or of some hidden relations. In art, of course, intuition is the essential driving force of creativity. However, scientific and artistic intuition are not always of the same character. True enough, the

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first spark of an idea or the first glimpse of some grand unification may come to the scientist in a similar unexplainable flash of insight as an artistic revelation. But, more often than not, scientific intuition comes from an unconscious or half-conscious awareness of existing knowledge or of connections between concepts that have not yet been consciously realized. But any intuitive scientific insight must be rationally validated afterward before it can be incorporated into the scientific edifice. In contrast, artistic intuition is the main instrument of creation and does not require any additional validation; it reigns superior and is the highest instance of judgment over and above the mold of style and fashion.

Hope

In what sense does the universe make sense? In the sense you sense a sense. Every true scientist feels a sense, consciously or unconsciously. If he did not, he would not go ahead, with that fervor so common among scientists, in his search for something that he calls the truth. Surely a large amount of ambition is mixed into this great fervor—acclaim, tenure, the Nobel Prize—but there is no denying that it exists. It is based upon a conviction that what the scientist does is worthwhile and will lead to an increase of insight, something that is great and valuable beyond any doubt, even if the fallibility of mankind makes the wrong use of it. Great insight leads to great power; great power always leads to great abuse.

The decay of a sense of meaning and the increase of cynicism in our culture have also contaminated the community of natural scientists and have shaken their conviction in various degrees for various members of that community; but there is still a good deal of belief in the purpose and meaning of their collective work. I cannot help feeling that they represent a "happy breed of men" among so many others who grapple with the problems of meaning, sense, and purpose.

The emerging scientific Weltbild contains much to support the enthusiasm and fervor of its propagators. The great unifying principles that underlie the plenitude of events become clearer with every decade. An outline of a history of the universe from the big bang to the human brain is taking shape, and becomes ever more convincing with the discoveries and insights that emerge from year to year. What is more startling and uncanny than the recent observation of the optical reverberation of the origin of the universe in the form of the cold radiation that fills all space? What is more impressive than the steady growth of our insights into the structure of matter, from molecules and atoms to nuclei, electrons, nucleons, and quarks, and the growing understanding of nature's fundamental forces? What is more overwhelming than the recognition of the

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chemical basis of life, in which the stability of the molecular quantum state emerges as the true basis of the fact that the same flowers appear again every spring?

Do we find a similar fervor and sense of purpose among other groups? Surely we do. We find it among those who are devoted to creative, artistic activities and among those who try to improve the social fabric of our times in many different ways. However, they face a much greater challenge. The problems of natural science are much less messy and much less interwoven with the complexity and fragility of the human mind. It is much easier to perceive an underlying order in the flow of natural events if human behavior is excluded.

The decay of previously existing sources for meaning, sense, and purpose—such as myth and religion—has left a big void in our bellies, a void that craves to be filled. Every human being craves for a meaning and a sense to his existence. The answers to these cravings must by necessity be holistic. They must embrace the totality of human experience and endow it with luster and light. With the decay of myth and religion, all that was left was an autonomous art that has made itself independent of any prevalent religion, and a new, most vigorous intellectual development: science. Can these two enterprises serve as providers of meaning and sense? Goethe has said:

> He who has Art and Science
> Has also a religion,
> But those who do not have them
> Better have religion.

Goethe's remark points out one important element common to both expressions of the human mind: their true significance is not easily accessible to a large part of mankind. Of course, there are many expressions of art, and some of science, that are indeed appreciated by large groups of people—such as folk art, popular art, popular science, and science fiction. However, these manifestations are not the most effective providers of sense and meaning. The grandest creations and achievements of art and science serve as inspirational sources only to a small minority of humans; their values seem to be not suitable for a wider spread. The large majority cannot get meaning, sense, and purpose from these sources. They must have some sort of religion, as Goethe says. Perhaps the greatest problem of our day is that this craving is no longer fulfilled by the conventional religions and that there is nothing to replace them.

The kind of meaning that science provides to its perpetrators has not proven to satisfy this craving, even though everybody is fully aware that we live in an age dominated by science and technology. On the contrary,

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this awareness is tied to a large extent to practical applications, among which the military ones and the destructive effects of technology on the environment play an important role. The scientific insights into the greatness and unity of the universe, in the large and in the small, have not penetrated much into the minds of the people. This is probably the fault of the scientists who do not try hard enough to transmit the elation they feel at the peak moments of their work. They are too much immersed in their narrow specialties and do not sufficiently seek to express the deep connections their insights have provided. It also is partly the fault of the artists and writers of today who neglect this task. Is it not the duty of art to remold all that is great and awe-inspiring in our culture and to lend it a form that stirs the souls of men? It may be, however, that the great ideas of science are not suitable to inspire outsiders with any true elation.

What is it, then, that contemporary art expresses? It reflects a frantic search for some kind of meaning by trying to go in many hitherto untried directions. We observe an outburst of new ways and forms of expression. From time to time, indeed, something really great and beautiful is created but, more often than not, what we see are the results of wild experimentation for the sake of being different from what has been done before. Perhaps this frantic search is a symptom of a lack of sense and meaning. Perhaps it is a method to arrive at a meaning.

Many of the creations of contemporary art, especially in literature, deal with the tragedy and the depth of our lack of purpose and meaning. In this effort our art is powerful, heart-rending, and deeply depressing. It acts as an amplifier of what is meant by the aforementioned void in the belly; it follows the great tradition of art by elevating this to grand tragedy. Even cynicism has been ennobled by contemporary art. But in it we do not find often enough those ingredients that permeated art in past centuries—beauty and hope.

In the meantime the members of the Goethe group get some luster of life from scientific insights if they can, or from works of art. Not least do they get it from the classical works of art which have retained their power and significance. Perhaps these seem today even more powerful and significant because they contain so many of those ingredients that are missing in much of contemporary art.

For the others among our fellowmen—and that is the vast majority—the burden is much heavier. Our material and spiritual world is in disorder and in danger of destruction. The great insights and elations of science, as well as of art, have not much impact on most of the people because these values are not connected with a ground swell of meaning that permeates the collective mind. But among the younger generation there are many signs and portents of a mounting craving for sense and

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purpose and for the dignity of the individual. This ground swell appears in various forms; some are constructive, some are destructive. There are promising efforts to improve the social and spiritual climate; there are cults and semi-religious sects. All too often some of these cults and sects have led to a misconceived mysticism and to a concentration on the inner self without the necessary relationship to society. Maybe there will come a day when scientific and artistic meaning will combine and help to bring forth that ground swell of meaning and value for which there is so great a need. The growing awareness of this need is in itself an important element that brings people together and creates common values and even elations. There is always hope—for hope.

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Red Umbrella

BRIAN SWANN

You go along. Your father dies. You
walk into the kitchen one morning. It
is bright. Your father is there. Your
mother is there. You smile at your
mother. Your mother is radiance. You
wake with your face and pillow wet.
Your hands hurt with climbing a fence
to the roof. From there you can see
all along the gardens. Fruit trees,
asparagus on raised beds. Birds
fly up to you. The fence high as
a house bends. You are on your
hands and knees grubbing in the soil.
You go along. Your father is dead.
Someone who shares a shelter
from the rain with you says:
I was once in the China Sea.
There was a typhoon. The rain
came in silver sheets. Each wave
brought its own curtain of rain.
The boats were dragging their
anchors. We were all on deck in
life jackets. I was young so I
had no thoughts of death. You
say, it'll let up in ten minutes.
Water slicked with oil
runs in gutters like rope. He
jumps into the storm, sticking
a red umbrella out at it.
The sun gives a gray glow. You
watch the birds. You
go along.

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Philip Rahv

A Memoir

IRVING HOWE

NO ONE MEETING PHILIP RAHV FOR THE FIRST TIME could fail to be struck by some bear-like image, jovial or angry but bear-like. It was not that he seemed especially large or fat; it was just that he so emphatically wanted to fill out his allotment of space. He would lurch across the room, weighty, unnerving, like a capsized ship.

Rahv was a Russian intellectual transported to American soil by some whim or joke of history. He carried this "Russian-ness" like a flag of pride, for to his mind it signified a decided metaphysical benefit. It meant being comprehensive, definitive, theoretical, overpowering. Russian intellectuals were serious; to be serious meant to be weighty; and to be weighty seemed a validation of the self. At the very least, "Russian-ness" provided a strategy for marking out points of superiority to native-born Americans, whether literary or not. (Certain persistently American intellectuals disliked Rahv's *Partisan Review* because they suspected, not without reason, that it was trying to make them feel dumb.)

Over the years, though Rahv's literary criticism grew finer, his prose got worse. Seeking the magisterial tone—a vice aging critics are peculiarly susceptible to—he began to write as if he were a judicial commission, perhaps appointed by a revolutionary government. He started padding his sentences with paired nouns, linked verbs, and elegant French phrases; they poured into his essays like dumplings into soup. This lure of things weighty must have had something to do with his Marxist past, a semi-secret sharer of his consciousness. Marxists admired weight, for it differentiated them from mere empiricists.

Though he wrote mostly about literature, and often surpassingly well, Rahv's criticism can't be understood apart from a fancied relation (mostly in his head) to some ideal Marxist text. Sometimes this stood as a relation of mimesis, sometimes parody, most often allegory. His essays moved along a double track. On one track he could faithfully follow the work being examined—an obligation he took with great seriousness—while on the other he might also trace out the half-blurred footprints of

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Marxism. Just as some of the New Critics seem in retrospect to have been ministers manqué, their rhetoric soaring to a preacher's climax while their matter failed to keep pace, so Rahv wrote with the pleased stateliness of the left-wing theoretician who brushes aside mere particulars in behalf of the largest trends. I seem to be lapsing into a little irony here, but I mean it to be amiable, even admiring, since I think Rahv's criticism was often helped, given bite and flavor, when he shadowed the motions of political argument—just as the New Critics were helped when, even while pledged to the self-sufficiency of the text, they wrote with the ardor of missionaries. Pure critics are rare birds, and they seldom fly very far.

The odd thing about Philip Rahv, and what made him finally so vivid and likable, was that behind his bulkiness of being and weightiness of word there was hidden a delicate creature, fastidious in appetite and denial. (Who, reading his prose, would ever suspect he was a superb cook?) He was also, as I knew him, a somewhat timid man. His magazine often carried a polemical air, but he himself was not really much of a fighter, for he shared both the uneasiness of the immigrant (you had to watch your step in this land of the goyim) and the anxieties of the ex-Communist.

But if he got you into a corner at a party, he could make a fearful racket. He would poke his finger into your chest, declare the "correct line" on a topic of the day, and, his voice dropping to a confidential growl, reduce to scorn and ashes some current literary fad. He would wind up with one of his famous tag lines, "Who needs it?"—a question that sufficed for dismissing a good portion of the universe. There were times when a blight of negation fell over his talk—really, I think, a deep personal nihilism—and then he would proceed to level all human motives to an appalling crudity, a sort of vulgar Marxism of personal life. Over the years, Rahv's friends must have been astonished to count up the number of things, persons, and ideas that, it turned out, the world didn't need. . . . Yet he could be finely sensitive to flickerings of mood, just as in his criticism he was sensitive to shadings of character and plot. Behind his air of assurance there was what some years ago we would have called "a feminine sensibility." Suddenly it would seem that he really cared about your feelings and wanted to ease your situation, especially if you were sufficiently flat on your back. Which would not prevent him, a week later, from making cruel fun of you to mutual friends. Himself an inhibited romantic, he took pleasure in sneering at "romantic foolishness" in the lives of his friends.

I first met Rahv in 1947. He was then at the top of his powers as editor of *Partisan Review*, the most influential literary magazine we have

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had in America this century. Its small circulation notwithstanding, *Partisan Review* could hoist reputations, push an unknown writer to prominence, deal out harsh punishments to philistines, middlebrows, and fellow travelers. Because the magazine stood for something, because it gave at least the impression of coherence, because it found strength in its glaring limitations, it gained authority in the intellectual world. One mark of that authority was the fear and rage it could evoke among enemies. Rahv knew and enjoyed this: why not?

I was then young, at least as inclined as Rahv to postures of certainty, and a member of a semi-Trotskyist political group, though inwardly starting to waver in my opinions. As if to suppress these doubts, I wrote a slashing polemic against *Partisan Review*'s retreat from Marxism (which was already beginning) and sent it off to Rahv. Whatever else, this was hardly the usual way of breaking into his pages. Perhaps amused by my cheekiness, Rahv asked me to drop in at the magazine's offices.

He was remarkably nice. (Later on, I would hear stories about acts of rudeness by the magazine's editors to young writers, but my own recollection is that both Rahv and his co-editor, William Phillips, were as gracious as a beginner could hope for.) I came up to their tiny office thinking it was a big event in my life . . . and, well, it was. With his low gurgle of a laugh—even his laughter seemed political!—Rahv gave me back my piece. "You don't really think we're going to print an attack on us, do you?" And then, in what he thought was a neat dig, "After all, you're a Marxist, so you ought to understand why we aren't going to act against our own interests." That finger of his started poking its way toward my chest, as if immediately to establish a tradition whereby mockery served as the token of friendliness. I tried to answer that Marxism spoke of the clashing interests of classes, not of editors and writers, but he would have none of that. As I was leaving, he asked if I'd like to review a book for the magazine. There were stacks of review copies lying around, and without grasping the significance of my choice I took a collection of Sholom Aleichem stories. When Rahv saw this, he smiled. Even among big talkers, some things don't have to be spelled out.

Rahv was a brilliant editor in those days, partly because he brought to the job not only energy and intelligence but a semiconspiratorial outlook. Editors necessarily overdefine issues and overdetermine responses—writers, in turn, have to resist editors. Rahv wanted his magazine to constitute a public act. He understood that, while bringing together good stories, poems, and essays could make *Partisan Review* interesting, that alone would not make it important. And he wanted it to be important, weighty.

What could give the magazine its cultural weight was that it should always seem to be moving somewhere, forward or backward, and the

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success of Rahv and Phillips in managing this effect was partly a result of their politicized intelligence. Let pure spirits not misunderstand: I don't mean that in *Partisan Review* literary judgments were systematically twisted to political ends, though sometimes of course they were. I mean that Rahv saw cultural life as if it were enacted in a political arena. The imagery of politics was congenital with him, an imagery of definition, conflict, alliance, exclusion. He ran the magazine as if he were heading a movement (sometimes with disagreeable results—as in the exclusion, during the fifties, of such "left deviationist" writers as Paul Goodman and Harold Rosenberg).

The battle Rahv was starting to organize against the New Critics was not just a literary dispute; it gained drama and urgency because he saw it as a quasi-political struggle. Nor was he entirely wrong. Conservative biases frequently broke past the protestations of the New Critics to ideological neutrality or indifference. But there was also a streak of comic fantasy in Rahv's generalship, for he was not exactly Lenin, nor was John Crowe Ransom, Kerenski.

Rahv liked some of the New Critics, especially Allen Tate, but he set out to fight them in the way a radical group sets out to fight tepid liberals or, better yet, divergent radicals. In his gravelly voice and with a mélange of accents that seemed to bear out the very principle of internationalism, he would say, "Oiving, why don't you smash [or "finish off": he liked strong verbs] this Tate?" I wasn't at all sure I could smash or finish off this Tate, but there was our editor-general beckoning to battle, and how could a mere corporal resist? Sometimes he led one into traps, as when he prodded me into writing a gratuitous attack, for which I still feel ashamed, on the criticism of James T. Farrell. Later, when I came to know Rahv pretty well, I suspected him of grinning privately at the scraps he got writers into, just as I suspected him of grinning at the difficulties of one's private life—even as he was sincerely trying to be helpful about them.

Sometimes that self-delighted shrewdness of his led Rahv to outsmart himself. In 1954 he got me to write a polemic called "This Age of Conformity," in which I attacked almost everyone for the growing conservative mood of the moment. The opinions I expressed were my own, but the enemies I made should have been Rahv's too. Anticipating that many people—the Trillings, for example—would be annoyed by my article, Rahv thought it clever to push me into battle while himself avoiding the return fire. But what he didn't understand, for all his claims to worldliness, was that, in this strange country of ours, writing such a blast and making such enemies might not do any harm to one's worldly prospects. On the contrary, as he once ruefully said, "It got your name in the papers." A sufficient measure of caution could lead to the loss of atten-

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tion, and this problem Rahv never quite solved.

In any case, there he was, conducting himself like the head of a party or the whip of a parliamentary caucus, with maneuvers so complicated they sometimes went right past their intended targets. It was a Marxist style, or a Marxist style in the phase of decadence, and among our "opponents" only Allen Tate responded satisfactorily, since in his own splendidly mad southern way he was always ready to charge into battle. No wonder Rahv and Tate became good friends: nothing but ideas stood between them.

The criticism Rahv wrote in his earlier years was marked by a note of high confidence. In 1949 he put out his first collection, *Image and Idea,* with pieces on Russian literature and some ambitious, if skewed, studies of nineteenth-century American fiction. He played an important part in the Henry James revival then under way, though he made it a point to distinguish himself from "the James cultists" who failed to see that their idol was finally not in a class with the greatest European novelists. In these early Rahv essays there is a fine interplay between image and idea: his Marxism, no longer mere system, provides cues for placing writers historically; yet his critical judgments are free, supple, and without ideological alloy. He takes pleasure, even, in discovering the moral perspicacity of a reactionary writer like Dostoevsky and in observing how Tolstoy plants his fictions in the soil of history while evoking a sense of humanity not easily reducible to historical categories.

The pieces on American literature are more questionable. Rahv was not well grounded in the American cultural tradition; he didn't know as much about Puritanism, and the steadily enriched views of it provided by recent scholarship, as a critic of American literature ought to know. His essays on Hawthorne and James fail to take into sufficient account the pressures of the pre-Emersonian native past. What he does is to posit as the central trait of nineteenth-century American writing a paucity or thinness of experience:

> A literature of sin is most naturally developed in a society suffering from a surfeit of experience—an excess which it cannot control because of a derangement of values. This was the condition of Russian society in Dostoevsky's time; and it is this unlimited availability of experience, amounting almost to anarchy, which enabled the Russian novelist to materialize his themes of sin and evil. . . . Now if regarded from this point of view, the American romancer must be placed at the opposite pole from the Russian novelist. The society to which he belonged suffered not from a surfeit but a poverty of experience; and far from being too fluid, its values were altogether too rigid. His problem was simpler than Dostoevsky's. . . . It can be defined as the problem of the reconquest, the reacquisition of experience in its cultural, esthetic and, above all, subjective aspects.

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In Hawthorne's fiction there is "the dark lady," "the unregenerate temptress"—Hester, Zenobia, Miriam—who moves toward or actually breaks into sexual passion: she represents a suppressed hunger for a richer experience than nineteenth-century Protestant America can allow. In James there is the "heiress of all the ages" whose "initial assignment . . . is to reconnoiter the scene rather than take possession of it." Keen as these essays are, they fail to consider the possibility that the tradition of New England Puritanism could release significant weights of experience, just as they fail to give sufficient attention to the hold upon Hawthorne and James of the usable remnants of that tradition.

There is something puzzling about the emphasis that Rahv and other *Partisan* critics gave to the "paucity of experience" theme in writing about American literature. It is a theme that stems from Henry James's book on Hawthorne and, more immediately perhaps, from Van Wyck Brooks's criticism, especially his study of Twain. This approach to nineteenth-century American writing is by no means entirely wrong, but it now seems inadequate, even historically patronizing. Why, it's worth asking, did not Perry Miller's version of American literary development, in its essentials available by the mid-forties, influence Rahv and the other New York critics? Perhaps because they felt uneasy with Miller's probings into New England religious thought and experience (probings that had their own element of parochialism, but which could have corrected Rahv's). Perhaps because the New York critics were suspicious of anything coming out of the Harvard English department, which they saw as a home of both native gentility and literary fellow-traveling. Perhaps because, in the self-assurance they felt at the time, they saw no reason to trouble themselves with "mere" academic scholarship. Whatever the reasons, the work of Miller and his disciples had almost no effect on the criticism of American literature that appeared in *Partisan Review* during the forties and fifties. If Rahv ever paid any serious attention to Miller's books, he never mentioned them in my presence.

Still another once-famous essay by Rahv divided American writers into two categories, the palefaces and redskins, or highbrows and lowbrows: "at one pole the literature of the lowlife world of the frontier and the big cities; at the other the thin, solemn, semi-clerical culture of Boston and Concord." "The paleface continually hankers after religious norms, tending toward a refined estrangement from reality. The redskin accepts his environment, at times to the degree of fusion with it. . . ." It's a simple enough division and, as many critics have noticed, it breaks down at crucial points: Melville isn't really paleface or redskin, and a theory of American literature that can't account for Melville has sprung a bad leak.

Still, precisely in their one-sidedness, Rahv's essays about American

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literature remain valuable. They display the voice of an outsider measuring his distance, a skeptical European sensibility unwilling to take at face value the claims to moral sublimity often advanced for our nineteenth-century writers. Had Rahv possessed a more complex view of the American past, he might have written about Hawthorne and James with greater balance but smaller point. His work, at the very least, challenges the cultural parochialism which often seems characteristic of the academic study of American literature. A critic's limitations can form the basis of his strengths.

Something painful happened to Rahv in the 1950s: he lost his bearings, perhaps his nerve. Plenty of other thoughtful people found this a difficult time, and it seems fair to say that a measure of disorientation could then be a sign of intellectual seriousness. But Rahv's response to the troubles of those years was, I think, unique among the intellectuals gathered around *Partisan Review*.

He went underground. Not literally, of course, since he kept up a public life as editor and, occasionally, writer. But he decided that the times had become threatening and reactionary; that there were now major risks in speaking out boldly; and that it might well be the better part of Marxist sagacity to lie low for a while. One can't, of course, pretend to precise evidence about such matters, but so it struck me at the time, in the years when we were rather close. Like other Marxists and recent ex-Marxists, Rahv overestimated the significance and duration of McCarthyism (which was bad enough without invoking visions of fascism). Perhaps somewhere in his imagination he summoned passages from Lenin about the desirability of taking shelter in a storm. There were also personal reasons for Rahv's partial withdrawal during these years, but I know that he thought of it—or at least spoke of it—primarily in political terms. When I got in touch with him about coming to join the English department at Brandeis, he welcomed the invitation, not just because it offered economic security but because it provided a place where he could dig in. From the vantage point of a quarter of a century later, all this may seem rather melodramatic, but there was, after all, some cause for being alarmed, even frightened, in those years, and Rahv's brand of Marxism, as well as the conspiratorial bent of his mind, encouraged melodrama.

There was also a good deal of confusion within the *Partisan* circle—by then hardly a circle any longer, since political differences had ripped it apart. Hopes for a vital anti-Stalinist radicalism lay shattered; the idea of a union between an independent leftist politics and a cultural stance championing literary modernism had come to seem dated or questionable (or both); and meanwhile, out there in the real world, the threat of

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Stalinism kept growing stronger. I don't propose here to argue whether this threat was overestimated by its opponents. That the Soviet Union did not take over Western Europe does not mean they were foolish to worry about the danger that it might. The coup in Czechoslovakia left a residue of anxiety and gloom, felt even by those who tried to resist Cold War simplifications. Rahv, while continuing to speak of himself as a radical, shared this anxiety and gloom. Anything else would have been insensitive.

After I started teaching at Brandeis in 1954, I would come down to New York once every two months or so and regularly spend time with Rahv. We would take long walks through the city and he would become expansive, complaining bitterly about the rightward turn of many of our intellectual friends, especially those around *Commentary*. I agreed with him, but somehow could not bring myself—either through courtesy, cowardice, or both—to add that his own magazine was also succumbing to this trend, though in a less extreme and arriviste way. Certainly, *Partisan Review* was not doing what its earlier admirers might have expected: it was not militantly rallying intellectuals to oppose McCarthyism, though it did of course print anti-McCarthy material. The magazine seemed to have lost its gift for leading and inspiring; it had ceased to be a fighting magazine; its editors no longer shared a coherent outlook; and thereby it would soon lose its central position in our intellectual life. For all this, there were, no doubt, complicated reasons beyond the grasp or control of any one person, but part of it was also due to Rahv's malaise, his loss of élan, his nervousness.

He could still turn out a lively piece full of the old fire and scorn, but he had made an estimate—politically mistaken, morally unheroic—that this wasn't the time to take chances. And by not taking chances (they didn't turn out to be such big chances, either), he allowed his energy to dribble away, his voice to lose its forcefulness. The literary essays he wrote during these years, such pieces as "The Myth and the Powerhouse" and "Fiction and the Criticism of Fiction," remain well-argued and well-spoken critiques of anti-historical approaches to the novel. But no literary essay could be central to the wracking political-intellectual troubles of that time.

One heard about Rahv's writer's block, which left him feeling wasted; but I suspect that a cause of this block was that he held himself in, repressing his true convictions or at least not fighting for them with the spirit that made his work so bracing in the late thirties. In conversation he still spoke as a Marxist who agreed, more or less, with Isaac Deutscher, that powerful and pernicious historian who, though repelled by the brutalities of Stalinism, expounded a theory of its essentially "progressive" character which came to be a rationale for its historical necessity.

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Rahv, in a first-rate piece on Orwell's *1984*, wrote in a decidedly other spirit, ending with a recommendation that the book be read by those "liberals who still cannot get over the political superstition that while absolute power is bad when exercised by the Right, it is in its very nature good and a boon to humanity once the Left, that is to say 'our own people,' take hold of it." Memorable words, but the moral lucidity they reflect would not always be in evidence during the following decade.

In the mid-sixties Rahv started coming up for air. By now he had almost nothing to do with *Partisan Review*, being openly contemptuous of what he called its "swinging" editorial policy under the control of William Phillips and Richard Poirier. He wrote some reviews for the *New York Review of Books*, coming to general agreement with its policy of friendliness to the New Left and hostility toward the counter-culture. With the growth of New Left groups on the campus and the appearance of lively young people who might now acknowledge his weight or at least relieve his loneliness up there in Waltham, Rahv began to wonder whether he might influence the undisciplined young rebels. In this he was by no means alone. Just about all of us who had experienced the debacles of the thirties and the dryness of the next two decades were tempted to seek political renewal through forming ties with the insurgent students. Noam Chomsky largely succeeded. Paul Goodman was a campus hero for a while, but as soon as he started criticizing New Left anti-intellectualism, he found himself isolated again. As for people like Michael Harrington and me, whatever hopes we may have had regarding the campus upsurge were soon dashed; if anything, it made our political isolation more extreme.

And here I must turn, with evident uneasiness, to a fierce quarrel between Rahv and myself in late 1967. It is an incident about which I can't pretend objectivity, though I can try to be honest. A small enough incident, one of those endless quarrels among intellectuals, but still with some revelatory value.

Suddenly and, as I then felt, out of nowhere, Rahv printed in the *New York Review* a long and harsh political attack on Harrington and me, to which he added approval of a work by Carl Oglesby, then president of Students for a Democratic Society. It was as if the previous two decades—with his hesitations, retreats, and silences—had never happened, as if we were still back in the earlier, happier days of *Partisan Review*. Presenting himself as a veteran Marxist voice and praising—this really came as a shock!—Oglesby's decision not to "exhibit or stress his anti-Communism," Rahv dismissed Harrington and me as mere social democrats; even worse, mere liberals. "Howe's attempt to set up anti-Communism as the supreme test of political rectitude on the Left strikes

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me as a terrible blunder. It leads him to ill-timed thrusts at the militant New Leftists. . . . Presumably a democratic socialist, Howe puts such illimitable emphasis on the adjective 'democratic' that in consequence his 'socialism' appears wide of the mark." And the New Left, continued Rahv, though it lacked theory, offered a valuable "school of politics," in which future "vanguardist" cadres could be trained.

All this was hard to take, and I think it's worth explaining why. During the sixties the small number of intellectuals maintaining a democratic socialist outlook—for instance, opposing the Vietnam war while refusing to join in the praise for the Communist Vietcong which kept ringing through the anti-war demonstrations—found themselves very hard pressed. We felt overwhelmed by the surge of New Left sentiment in the intellectual and academic worlds; we felt besieged and isolated. Just as an earlier generation of Stalinists had declared social democracy to be "the main enemy," so the New Left now used "liberal" and "social democrat" as terms of the most savage contempt. Repeatedly I found myself hissed down at campus meetings, and it was not just my opinions that were under assault—that, after all, would have been entirely normal and appropriate—but my very being, my claim to some measure of persistence and integrity. What the New Left wanted to do with people like Harrington and me was not just to refute us; it wanted, at least in its more militant phase, to erase, to "smash" us. In this sense, if none other, it had picked up some Bolshevik habits. And now along came Philip Rahv, not exactly notable for his political outspokenness during the previous fifteen years, to join this New Left assault.

Had I been wise, I would have ignored the whole thing, perhaps sending Rahv a postcard bearing his favorite tag, *"Who needs it?"* I was not wise. I wrote a long reply, arguing against Rahv's apparent softening of opposition to Communism and the Soviet regime, defending the social democratic approach to American politics, and, I must confess, needling him personally: "After nearly twenty years of planful circumspection, appears Philip Rahv offering Harrington and myself Little Lessons in Leninism. A delicious spectacle for the theatre of the absurd: Rip Van Winkle wakes up and fancies himself at the Smolny Institute."

This was neither kind nor meant to be. It had the effect, however, of provoking Rahv to a vigorous rebuttal in which he again proclaimed the bankruptcy of liberalism and social democracy, and aligned himself with "vanguardist" politics ("vanguardist" was a euphemism akin to "critical theory").

To many people, no doubt including readers of this journal, such quarrels seem hopelessly futile. Perhaps so. A more considered judgment might be that here was another instance of the desperate circumstances in which leftist intellectuals in America have found themselves: deprived

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of a vital movement to which they could devote their talents and from which they might, in turn, gain a tempering discipline. Now, a dozen years later, I find myself trying to think through what was really happening in this brawl, and without minimizing the differences between Rahv and myself, it becomes clear to me that I was hurt and angered in ways that went beyond politics. What troubled me was not just the semi-comic spectacle of Rahv suddenly decking himself out in a vanguardist costume, as if he were a veteran of 1917; it was a feeling that he was being personally disloyal, that even if all or some of what he said was true, he should not have been the one to say it. This, I confess, is an archaic sentiment and one that has taken me a long time to acknowledge. Very little in the political and intellectual traditions that Rahv and I shared had prepared me to feel at ease with this sentiment or him to give it serious consideration.

Somewhat later, when Rahv started his own magazine, *Modern Occasions*, he wrote me two or three times asking that I do some pieces for him. Once, as if nothing had changed since 1947, he proposed that I do a blast against a volume of essays by Robert Langbaum, a specialist in Victorian poetry. Perhaps to "smash" him? I declined the assignment, and we never spoke to one another again.

Two of Rahv's friends, Arabel J. Porter and Andrew J. Dvosin, have recently edited a collection of his work, *Essays on Literature and Politics, 1932–1972*. The book, apart from omitting his essays on the criticism of fiction, gives a satisfactory overview of Rahv's achievement. It is an achievement that now strikes me as greater than most literary people might acknowledge. Rahv never won the sort of following that both Edmund Wilson and Lionel Trilling enjoyed, but with a certain kind of novel—the kind in which image and idea, represented experience and asserted ideology, come into tense relation—he seems to me a better critic than either of them.

For many years Rahv struggled painfully to complete a book on Dostoevsky, and what we have, in *Essays on Literature and Politics*, are five pieces from that work. All are first-rate, the one on *Crime and Punishment* a masterpiece of criticism. With ease and authority, Rahv summons in these essays the intellectual and historical forces that condition Dostoevsky's novels: the heterodox reading of Russian orthodoxy, the equally heterodox relation to Western utopian socialism, the borrowing of the Napoleonic motif from Stendhal and Balzac, the complex involvement with Nietzsche. These matters are woven intricately into Rahv's analysis of the novels themselves, so that, when he discusses *Crime and Punishment* the peregrinations of Raskolnikov, the nihilist sensualism of Svidrigaïlov, the stirring helplessness of Sonia are seen both as emblems of

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thought and qualities of being. Rahv is especially keen on the indeterminateness of Dostoevsky's characters: "Never quite certain as to what it was exactly that induced him to commit murder, Raskolnikov must continually spy on himself in a desperate effort to penetrate his own psychology and attain the self-knowledge he needs if he is to assume responsibility for his absurd and hideous act. And this idea of him as the criminal in search of his own motive is precisely what is so new and original in the figure of Raskolnikov." Equally admirable is the way Rahv takes over the New Critical preoccupation with point of view, but puts it at the service of larger conceptual ends:

> How to portray with entire cogency a hero who is a solitary and monomaniac acting throughout in a mood of "morbid irritability" verging on madness, without succumbing to him, that is to say, without letting him take the lead to the degree of making the world over in his image? This is but another way of formulating one of the principal difficulties which forced Dostoevsky to abandon the first versions of the book. For to have permitted Raskolnikov, as first-person narrator, to absorb the story unto himself would surely have resulted in its impoverishment, producing an impression of life closing in, a claustrophobic effect diminishing the hero's stature in our eyes and turning him into an altogether special case. And this is where the Marmeladovs come in exactly, that for all the grimness of their situation and its grotesque features they still somehow exist within the bounds of the normal. . . . Their presence adds considerably to the story's quota of circumstantial realism, helping to overcome the hazard implicit in Raskolnikov's malaise.

To read these pieces on Dostoevsky is to experience a pang of regret that Rahv could not break out of his difficulties and finish his book. It would have brought the arid concluding years of his life to the triumph he surely deserved. And it would have delighted his admirers and friends, even those who thought, at one or another moment, that they had no choice but to quarrel with him.

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Invective Against Denise, a Witch

Translated from the French of Pierre de Ronsard

ANTHONY HECHT

The hatred I reserve for thee
Surpasses the malignity
    Of camel and of bear,
Old witch, unseemly thaumaturge,
Whipped by the Public Hangman's scourge
    The length of the town square.

Luring about you, like a brood,
The vulgar, curious and lewd,
    You shamelessly lay bare
Your haunches to the sight of men,
Your naked shoulder, abdomen
    Emblazoned with blood-smear.

And yet that punishment is slight
Compared to what is yours by right;
    Just Heaven must not bestow
Its mercy on so foul a thing
But rather by its whirlwind bring
    Such proud excesses low.

Still wracked by the brute overthrow
The Titans suffered long ago,
    A brooding Mother Earth,
To spite the Gods, in her old age
Shall, in an ecstasy of rage,
    At last bring you to birth.

You know the worth and power of both
Rare herbals and concocted broth
    Brought from the tropic zone;

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You know the very month and hour
To pluck the lust-inducing flower
That makes a woman groan.

There's not, among the envenomed plants
On mountain or in valley haunts,
One that your eyes have missed
And has not yielded up its ground
To your bright sickle-blade, and crowned
Your formidable quest.

When, like a lunatic, all bare,
The moon lets down its mystic hair
Of cold, enraging light,
You wrap your features in the hide
Of animals, and smoothly glide
Abroad into the night.

Your least breath ravishes the blood
Of all dogs in the neighborhood
And sets them on to bark,
Makes rivers flow uphill, reversed,
And baying wolves observe your cursed
Hegira through the dark.

Chatelaine of deserted spots,
Of mouldered cemetery plots
Where you are most at home,
Muttering diabolic runes,
You disinter the troubled bones
From their sequestered tomb.

To grieve a mother more you don
The aspect of her only son
Who has just met his death,
And you assume the very shape
That makes an aged widow gape
And robs her of her breath.

You make the spellbound moon appear
To march through the all-silvered air,
And cast through midnight's hush

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Such tincture on a pallid face
A thousand-cymbaled crashing brass
Could not restore its flush.

The terror of us all, we fear
Your hateful practice, and we bar
Your presence from our door,
Afraid you will inflict a pox
Upon our persons, herds and flocks,
With juice of hellebore.

Often I've watched as you espy
From far away with baleful eye
Some shepherd on his heights;
Soon after, victim of your arts,
The man is dead, his fleshly parts
A nest of parasites.

And yet like vile Medea, you
Could sometimes prove life-giving, too;
You know what secret thing
Gave Aeson back his sapling youth,
Yet by your spells you have in truth
Deprived me of my spring.

O Gods, if pity dwells on high,
May her requital be to die,
And may her last repose,
Unblessed by burial, serve as feast
To every gross and shameful beast,
To jackals and to crows.

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From Clerk to Clerk

Writing Diplomatic History

ELIE KEDOURIE

My book *In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth*, published in 1976, would, I suppose, be classified by librarians and bibliographers as a work of diplomatic history. This would no doubt be appropriate, for as its subtitle indicates, the work deals with the letters which were exchanged in 1915–16 between the British High Commissioner in Egypt and the Sharif of Mecca, and which prepared the way for what is known as the Arab Revolt.

But what does this classificatory label, diplomatic history, signify? At the beginning of the book I quote, as an epigraph, a sentence from G. M. Young's *Victorian England.* This is to the effect that diplomatic history is no more than "the record of what one clerk said to another clerk." My intent in putting these words at the head of my book was ironical; it was to dismiss Young's own dismissive attitude toward diplomatic history, in the belief that what "one clerk said to another clerk" is quite as worthy of historical investigation as any other human activity.

But why was Young so dismissive of this kind of history? We do know that his tastes and talents as a historian lay elsewhere: in history, he believed, what was important was "not what happened, but what people felt about it when it was happening." The distinction, we may feel, is in the end unsatisfactory and untenable, the erection into a dogma of what can be a matter only of sentiment and inclination. Young's own work, in its strengths and weaknesses, confirms this view. His masterpiece, *Victorian England: Portrait of an Age* is a marvelous and unmatched account of what English people felt about the Victorian age "when it was happening"; whereas his biography of Stanley Baldwin—concerned, as such a work would have to be, with "what happened"—is by common consent a failure. But who can doubt that the one is as fully legitimate a historical enterprise as the other, or that political biography in the hands of a master can be as accomplished as *Victorian England*?

A great many historians would now agree with Young in his low estimate of diplomatic history, but their reason is unlikely to be the same as his. Principle and doctrine would today be advanced in justification of such a judgment. Diplomatic history, it would be said, is an inferior kind of subject dealing with the surface of things, and by no means able to give us that total picture of a society which the historian should ideally aim to provide. The nearest approximation to this ideal kind of history is held to be social history.

Many reasons may be cited to explain the high regard for social history which is prevalent today. It is widely believed that such history deals with activities and events which in some sense are more real, more fundamental than the political transactions between states which are the usual concern of diplomatic historians. This belief in the primacy of social history is no doubt one outcome of Marxist ideas and of their wide dissemination. For if it is assumed that the particular mode of production prevalent in a society determines the character of all its other activities, then social history, or a variant thereof, must assume a commanding position. As is well known, the so-called *Annales* School has done a great deal to endow social history with its newly

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found prestige; and as it happens, one reason why two of the principal founders of the school, Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre, became attracted to social and economic history was their belief that the real history of a society must begin with, and be based upon, the history of its economic activity. The rest was dismissed and damned as mere *histoire événementielle*—as so much frothy gossip about Cleopatra's nose, the Ems telegrams, and sealed wagons speeding toward the Finland Station.

Another feature of what may be called *Annales* doctrine leads in the same direction. In this doctrine *histoire événementielle* is contrasted to the *longue durée*, by which is meant those features of a society which are believed to persist through generations and centuries, to be almost permanent if not eternal. These features, it is said, yield the key to reality, the real reality. This prejudice in favor of what is believed to change very slowly or not at all ends in paradox: it diverts the historian from what is, after all, the raison d'être of his activity, which is to exhibit change (whether slow or rapid) and account for it. The historian, stopping his ear to the din made by events tiresomely following one another in quick succession, becomes the servant and priest of this majestic and immutable *longue durée* and, in Febvre's words, devotes himself to the "static study of the facts of history." Whoever says *longue durée* is on the brink of saying *structure*, and it is of course no surprise that the new fashion in history should be prevalent where Marxism, sociologism, and structuralism (in its various senses) are fashionable. The whole of this movement is admirably encapsulated in a passage in the editorial which inaugurated, in the summer of 1977, the first number of *Review*, the journal of the Fernand Braudel Center for the Study of Economics, Historical Systems and Civilizations at the State University of New York at Binghamton. In this editorial, entitled "The Tasks of Historical Social Science," the editor, Immanuel Wallerstein, declares:

> *Annales* stood for the economic and social roots of history against the political and diplomatic facade, for the quantified trends against the chronological narrative, for the social sciences against historical uniqueness, for "global man" against "fractional man," for Braudel's *longue durée* against the *événementielle* [*sic*].

This is emphatically and categorically put, and such strict, uncompromising separation of sheep from goats is not without its heuristic uses. Is it so easy, we are moved to wonder, in the flow of historical events to say which is "root" and which is "facade"? Why is it that what one clerk writes to another clerk is not as real as technological change or a change in economic relations? By what criteria is one to decide that a diplomatic transaction or a battle is inherently less significant than a change in the quantity of money, or in agricultural methods, or in techniques of manufacture? If the consequences or the extent of change are the criteria, then Waterloo or the Nazi-Soviet pact or the Final Solution is no less momentous than the enclosure of the commons, the steam engine, or the industrial mode of production. No less, but also no more momentous. Yet to put it this way is to commit oneself to exactly nothing. Indeed on this point one can only say nothing; for how is one to establish that one criterion rather than another must have the historians' undivided allegiance? Equally with G. M. Young, then, the followers of the *Annales* School, in practicing their kind of history, do no more than follow their bent—or perhaps the fashion. But to follow one's bent guarantees nothing. A social historian may be equally a genius or a mediocrity—and so may a diplomatic historian. Historians' choices of subject do not tell us whether their books are valuable or useless, dull or sparkling. The scribblings of clerks may indeed be unbearably tedious, but *longue durée*, too, can be a tremendous bore.

But diplomatic history, dominant for so long in the academy, has now fallen into some disrepute. It is widely taken to be at bottom no more than a précis, more or less methodical, of diplomatic correspondence. If diplomatic history involved no more than this, then the disrepute would be well merited. Like all good history, however, good diplomatic history starts not with a heap of materials which it aspires to put into some kind of order, but with a sense of puzzlement—puzzlement about an action or a statement which at first blush seems obscure in its details or its significance, or perhaps not easy to reconcile with the surrounding circum-

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stances or with the past behavior of the agent. Thus the history which a historian undertakes is an inquiry. An inquiry is a question, and the historian is an inquirer: an asker of questions. The diplomatic historian is, likewise, an asker of questions about transactions between those organized bodies politic which we now call states. His puzzlement may relate to one particular transaction, or to the character and modus operandi of foreign ministries and their agents over a particular period. He may ask questions about all these things or, starting from his original inquiry, he may come to be interested in a much wider range of issues. I say may come to be, because of course the initial inquiry does not and cannot itself specify what the answer will be, or through what unexpected meanderings and unlikely byways it may lead the inquirer.

All this can be illustrated from the history of *In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth*, a work which, as has been said, may be labeled as diplomatic history. So far as I can establish, the book's genesis occurred during a train journey from London to Oxford in May or June 1951. I had taken with me to read on the train Sir Ronald Storrs's well-known memoirs, *Orientations*, which had been published in 1937. Although I then knew little or nothing about the history of the Middle East, I had some personal experience of Middle Eastern society and politics. Judged by this experience, and by the tradition which underpinned and interpreted it, Storrs's discourse rang false. The characters he described, their actions and reactions, seemed to belong to a political world more sophisticated and lighthearted, more benign and straightforward, than the crude corruption, brutality, and ideological ranting which was what the spectacle of political life disclosed to a schoolboy growing up in Baghdad in the 1930s and 1940s. Why exactly there was this discrepancy—if indeed there was a discrepancy—between Storrs's report and one's own experience, I could not then possibly have said. But this discrepancy between the memorialist's reminiscences and what I had tested on the pulse of experience was the origin of the puzzlement which later led me, in ways then unforeseen, to embark on the diplomatic history of the Middle East in the First World War. As I read on, the impression of falseness emanating from Storrs's book became gradually overwhelming. It was summed up for me, as I vividly remember, in the difference between two illustrations included in the book. One was a photograph of Storrs taken while he was on a visit to the Sharif of Mecca in 1916, and the other was the reproduction of a drawing of Storrs executed by Eric Kennington for T. E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. The contrast between Kennington's superior being and the rather ordinary shifty-looking character revealed by the camera seemed to me to symbolize and point up the dissonance which had struck me so forcibly.

As I have said, my knowledge of Middle Eastern history was then very slight. Of the subjects we were required to read for the degree I had just taken—subjects which ranged from economics to British government—it was the history of European political thought that I found most attractive. If I could be said to have known any history then, my knowledge would have been found to lie in the general field of intellectual history, of whose problems I had a more or less hazy idea. Diplomatic history was far from my mind. But if my knowledge of Middle Eastern history was minimal, I was certainly interested in a topic that had to do with the part of the world from which I came: hence my reading of such books as *Orientations*.

I found myself on a train to Oxford in 1951 because I was going there to be interviewed for a scholarship at St. Antony's College, which had just been founded. The upshot was that I spent two years at that college, studying and writing about Middle Eastern history. My first inclination had been to investigate the changing image which British writers had of the Middle East in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This was a topic in intellectual history—the kind of history with which my undergraduate studies had made me most familiar and the kind of history, in fact, which (to recall and adapt Young's distinction) dealt not with what happened but with what people thought about what was happening. Yet it was not very long before I came not so much to abandon the history of ideas as to feel the need for doing also another kind of history—namely, diplomatic history. Reading books like Storrs's memoirs made me increasingly feel that here were stories and episodes which, as recounted by the authors, left large areas obscure. There were

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these dissonances; things did not connect; there were large gaps in the narrative: gaps between what was said and what was done, between the description of a man's character and disposition and the report of his actions. No doubt it was possible to extract from a work like *Orientations* the image of the Middle East which its author had formed, but gradually such an enterprise began to seem unsatisfactory. Here it was not a simple matter of relating image to reality. The author of the image was himself engaged in changing the reality; and fully to understand the character of his image required one to understand his engagement with the reality. Knowledge of what did happen was necessary in order to understand how people, some people at any rate, felt about what happened.

The logic, or let us perhaps say the drift, of the original inquiry led me to an interest in political and diplomatic history. The circumstances which prevailed at St. Antony's and in the University of Oxford had their part to play in the redirection of my interests. At that time very few senior members of the University had any concern with the modern history of the Middle East. Since, being *in statu pupillari*, I had to be assigned a supervisor, the Warden of St. Antony's, F. W. Deakin, agreed that John Wheeler-Bennett, then a fellow of the college, could, as well as any other history don, serve as my supervisor. As is well known, Wheeler-Bennett's field was modern European history, and our contacts were infrequent. He gave me tea once a term, and our conversations on these agreeable occasions ranged widely. I came away from these meetings with a picture of Central Europe and its political society which the Nazi ruffians had in part seduced and in part destroyed, a picture skillfully conveyed by this elegant, monocled scholar and man of the world. This of course had no direct bearing on my own concerns. But I was well content with this state of affairs; if it did not forward my studies, it also did nothing to hinder them. This, however, is putting it too negatively, since my conversations with Wheeler-Bennett gave me, in some fashion, an insight into, a feel for, diplomatic history. But it was my fellow students in the junior common room who were mainly responsible for my education as a historian. The junior common room at St. Antony's was, in those early days, quite small; it was composed overwhelmingly of historians, with a sprinkling of physicists. The historians, as I recall, were most of them Oxford men who, for their undergraduate degree, had had to read a great deal of political and diplomatic history. My education—as I can see in retrospect—was effected by means of casual conversations that sometimes turned into discussions about some problem or episode occurring in their work on the recent history of Central Europe, or France, or Spain, or the British government of India. I sometimes participated in these conversations, but as often as not I was content to be the silent listener. Thus the intellectual life of the junior common room, with its impromptu conversations and its informal discussions, worked on me, in diverse, indirect, unregarded, and mysterious ways, to elicit new questions concerning my own work, to open up hitherto unsuspected perspectives, and to stimulate a critical scrutiny of evidence, inference, and narrative. What took place, then, is not without analogy to the obscure and silent movements of the mind underlying philosophical and poetic creativity which Valéry evokes in his poem "Palme":

> *Ces jours qui te semblent vides*
> *Et perdus pour l'univers*
> *Ont des racines avides*
> *Qui travaillent les déserts.*

My work at St. Antony's resulted in a book which I finished writing in December 1953 and which was published in April 1956 under the title *England and the Middle East: The Destruction of the Ottoman Empire 1914–1921*. It was an enterprise of some temerity. When the plan of the book took shape in my mind, it was by no means clear that I would have enough evidence at my disposal to be able to produce a consecutive and coherent account which, if it could not be comprehensive (and it could not then possibly be), would at least show the reader where the gaps and the obscurities lay. Two things may be pleaded in palliation of my temerity. In the first place, accounts of Middle Eastern history in the First World War then extant were unsatisfactory. They were generally incurious and uncritical, and (what was even worse) they were either plain or disguised political advocacy, or else unwittingly tainted with

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political parti pris. In the second place, though the evidence was not as abundant as it became when the British archives were opened after 1966, a close examination disclosed quite a respectable body of materials available for the historian's scrutiny. In the three decades or so after the end of the war a large literature of memoirs, eyewitness accounts, and military histories in European languages had accumulated. Careful scrutiny of this literature and the comparison of various accounts, statements, and allegations proved very fruitful. A case in point here was T. E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom;* treated not reverentially as the utterance of a genius but coolly, as the apology of an interested party, it could yield interesting, indeed revealing, evidence. In the second place, most opportunely, a voluminous official selection from the British archives dealing with the Middle East in 1919 was published when I was in the middle of my research. Again, I gradually and with difficulty discovered that there was an accumulation of Arabic chronicles and memoirs, with a great deal of valuable documentation, of the existence of which practically no historian had hitherto shown himself aware. I was also lucky in locating a few small collections of archives of which the most important were Lord Milner's papers, then in the library at New College, Oxford, and those of William Yale, who, during the war, acted as Special Agent in the Near East of the U.S. Department of State, and was subsequently attached to the King-Crane Commission, sent to investigate political conditions in the Levant in 1919.

Like anyone concerned with studying British policy in the Middle East during the First World War, I had of necessity to consider the meaning and significance of the McMahon-Husayn correspondence. (Sir Henry McMahon was the British High Commissioner in Cairo.) And here one document which I came upon in the Yale Papers I found of great use. The document was anonymous, and I had no means of guessing its provenance or authorship. This long typescript, entitled "British Commitments to King Hussein," seemed to be either a British official document or compiled from British official documents. Its value to me lay in the long and numerous extracts from letters and reports composed in 1914–16 which it included and which, taken together with the evidence from other sources, yielded a reasonably coherent picture of the course of the negotiations between the British and the Sharif of Mecca. What further struck me about the document was that some of the judgments its author made did not seem to be supported by the evidence he was quoting. But, knowing nothing about the provenance or purpose of the document, I was not in a position to say whether its author was perhaps relying for his conclusions on further evidence which he knew but was not quoting.

Taking, however, the evidence yielded by this paper (such as it was), and putting it side by side with that gleaned from my other sources, I found it possible to make a coherent and credible picture of the Anglo-Sharifian negotiations. While attending to these fragments of evidence, turning them over in my mind, and deliberating upon them, I happened upon a passage written by D. G. Hogarth, who had been intimately involved in Anglo-Sharifian affairs during the last two years of the war. This passage figured in a chapter that Hogarth contributed to a work edited by the historian H. W. V. Temperley, *A History of the Peace Conference,* which appeared in 1924. Hogarth summed up, within the compass of a single sentence, McMahon's commitments. He wrote:

> While [McMahon's letter of October 24, 1915] explicitly ruled out of the negotiations all the Turkish speaking districts which Hussein had claimed as Arab, and all Arab societies with whose chiefs we already had treaties—while further, it reserved to French discretion any assurance about the independence of Syrian littoral, or the freedom from tutelage of the interior, i.e. the districts of the four towns, Damascus, Homs, Hama and Aleppo—while by reserving other Arab regions in which France might have peculiar interests, it left the Mosul district and even, perhaps, Palestine, in doubt—while, finally, it stated expressly that no guarantee for the unconditional delivery of either Lower or Upper Iraq to the Arabs could be given by us—in spite of all those reservations it recognised an Arab title to almost all the vast territories which Hussein had claimed, including Mesopotamia, subject only to limiting, but not annulling conditions.

This marvelously intricate sentence, confidently driving with an easy rein its elaborate equipage of subordinate clauses, negotiating

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detail after detail in its leisurely progress, and dexterously bringing the reader through at last to the ironical conclusion—this sentence acted as a catalyst for my thoughts. It was one of those rare passages which, as one reads them, immediately and irrevocably make a difference to one's mental landscape, such that things will never seem quite the same again. I felt somehow that Hogarth's words encapsulated the truth about this transaction, the full details of which I did not, at that point, possess. The passage made sense, as no other statement did, of the evidence I had collected. The feeling was to be confirmed by the additional evidence which began to be available ten years after the publication of *England and the Middle East.* That evidence, as set out in *In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth,* confirms that, as I wrote in this book, Hogarth's was a punctiliously accurate account of McMahon's promises.

McMahon's letter of October 24, 1915, has a reference to four Syrian towns: Damascus, Homs, Hama, and Aleppo. McMahon declares that territory lying to the West of these "districts" . . . "cannot be said to be purely Arab" and is thus to be excluded from the boundaries of the Arab state which the Sharif of Mecca had claimed. After the First World War this passage occasioned a great deal of controversy, in relation to an issue which had not in fact been specifically the subject of negotiation between McMahon and the Sharif. This issue was that of the territory known after the war as Palestine. The Arabs of Palestine claimed that Britain was not at liberty to make the promises embodied in the Balfour Declaration, since McMahon's words about Damascus and the other three places meant that Palestine was to be included in the prospective Arab state. Not only was such a reading of McMahon's words not immediately obvious, but the more one looked at McMahon's statement, the more obscure and intriguing it became. The collection of towns enumerated in McMahon's letter seemed to be chosen at random, since they were not—either administratively speaking or in terms of population and economic importance—all in the same category; nor was it true that territories to the west of them were less (or for that matter, more) purely Arab than they were; and no one who thought in terms of the administrative geography of the Ottoman Empire would have been likely to assume that these four towns were, or ever had formed, a distinct group, or had been a boundary line, or that they ever constituted the several centers of any identifiable province.

Why, then, did McMahon group together these four disparate place-names? The evidence I had when writing *England and the Middle East* did not afford an answer to this question. What could be established at that stage was that this peculiar formulation came not from the Arab, but from the British, side. All else was obscure, but here was one question which the opening of the archives, one hoped, would eventually settle. As it happened, however, before they were opened, new light was unexpectedly thrown on the problem. In 1961, Emile Marmorstein published "A Note on 'Damascus, Homs, Hama and Aleppo.' " In this article he drew attention to the fact that the well-known Muslim chronicler, Ibn al-Athir (1160–1234), had stated that these four towns were all that remained to the Muslims following the Crusaders' invasion of Syria. This statement, as Marmorstein went on to point out, passed, through the intermediary of a French eighteenth-century orientalist, into Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall,* where the historian declares (in Chapter 57) that "the four cities of Homs, Hamah, Damascus and Aleppo were the only relics of the Muhammedan conquests in Syria" that remained following the Crusaders' onslaught. Marmorstein argued that here was the origin and explanation of the peculiar phraseology of McMahon's famous letter. He also thought the real author of this passage was not McMahon himself but Sir Mark Sykes, a member of Parliament and an Eastern traveler and author, who was then serving as an assistant to Lord Kitchener and adviser on Middle Eastern problems.

In Marmorstein's suggestion there was something immediately convincing, indeed obvious. For what else but such a literary source could account for this bizarre conjunction of the four towns—a conjunction hitherto unknown to administrative usage or diplomatic negotiation? But, of course, belief in the essential rightness of this explanation rested on no documentary evidence. And when the documents became available, voluminous as they were, they afforded, ironically

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enough, no conclusive proof one way or the other. The documents did establish that Mark Sykes, however inclined for sentimental reasons he might have been to confine the Arabs to that part of Syria which the Crusaders did not invade, in fact had nothing to do with either the negotiations which led to the dispatch of McMahon's letter or the drafting of its terms. Beyond this the documents are silent. But the records do provide some clues to the mystery. They do establish that it was the Oriental secretary in Cairo, none other than Ronald Storrs, who mainly carried on the Sharifian negotiation, and that it was he who drafted other letters to the Sharif in the series now known as the McMahon-Husayn correspondence. They also establish that he considered the Sharif's territorial demands exorbitant. This son of a bishop might also be thought to manifest a hint of bigotry mixed with an amused condescension toward the Muslims whom he, a servant of the British Empire, helped to administer and control. There was in him, again, a potent feeling of self-admiration—admiration of his own exquisite taste, of his cultivated sensibility, of his erudition. Of all those in Cairo who were concerned with Arabian affairs, Storrs was the one, it seemed to me, who would have thought it clever and amusing surreptitiously to introduce Gibbon into a diplomatic negotiation. Thus even though there was no evidence to prove its truth beyond peradventure, Marmorstein's inspired suggestion seemed to account best for what we know.

Yet another event between the publication of *England and the Middle East* in 1956 and the opening of the archives ten years later played its part in the genesis of *In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth*. In 1964 the London *Times* published an article written by its foreign editor which purported to throw new light on the various promises the British had made during the First World War. The *Times* article drew its inspiration from another article which shortly before had appeared in an Arabic magazine. The author of this latter article had had access to the papers of Professor W. L. Westermann, a member of the U.S. Delegation to the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, which were deposited in the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace at Stanford University. Among those papers was a copy of the same report, "British Commitments to King Hussein," which I had come upon in the Yale Papers when writing *England and the Middle East*. The Westermann copy (which I had examined in 1959), however, left absolutely no doubt that the report was an official British document. The author of the Arabic article drew from this the conclusion (in which he was followed by the foreign editor of the *Times*) that, given the remarks of its (still) anonymous author about British promises to the Sharif, here at last was official proof of a contention which British governments had been rather reluctant to accept: namely, that Palestine had been included in these promises. Familiar as I was with the report, I wrote to the *Times* to draw attention to the discrepancy between the evidence marshaled in the report and the conclusions of its author: that the document was official did not ipso facto prove the truth of what it asserted. The publication of my letter in turn moved Leonard Stein to write to me. Stein, the author of a well-known work, *The Balfour Declaration* (1961), asked for some further details about the document in question. He himself had not seen it, but he had, as he told me, heard of it. He had been told that its author was Arnold Toynbee, who had been in the Political Intelligence Department of the Foreign Office during the last months of the war. Stein had also heard that toward the beginning of the Second World War Malcolm MacDonald had called for a copy of Toynbee's report, and on reading it had made marginal notes critical of Toynbee's conclusions.

Stein's letter opened for me new vistas on the McMahon-Husayn correspondence. For if his information was correct, not only the correspondence and its immediately attendant circumstances needed to be investigated, but the letters also had perhaps had a subsequent history of official commentary and interpretation which might be worth examining. Thus for me, like the passage from Hogarth quoted earlier, Stein's letter was again a kind of catalyst. It awakened my mind to possibilities which, when the opening of the archives two years later allowed the evidence to be examined, took shape as the organizing idea of the book and governed its structure.

It may be said in passing that while Stein's information about Toynbee's authorship of the "Commitments" report was correct,

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there is no evidence that MacDonald read the report or annotated it. But the story possibly had a basis in an incident which took place in 1940 and which I describe in *In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth.* It appears that in 1940 Toynbee told a colleague at Chatham House that he had written a memorandum in 1918 which showed that Palestine and Syria had been promised to the Sharif. Toynbee alleged that his conclusion had been accepted by the Foreign Office but that later, "as the result of Jewish pressure," the British government changed its attitude and began to cast about for ways of showing that Palestine was not included in its promises. Toynbee's colleague took the story to MacDonald, who ordered an inquiry. The Colonial Office had no copy of Toynbee's memorandum. It asked the Foreign Office to investigate. There, the civil servant concerned—after investigation and to his chagrin—had to inform the Colonial Office that he found no evidence that Toynbee's conclusions had been suppressed in response to Jewish pressure.

When they were at last opened in 1966, the archives proved to be voluminous, scattered in different series and somewhat difficult to piece together. The historian, of course, has no right to complain of such a state of affairs, since archives are not collected or arranged for his benefit. But the scattered condition of these particular archives had a bearing and influence on the conduct of policy. In a private letter of April 1916 to the Foreign Secretary (quoted in my book), McMahon confessed that, in dealing with the Arab question, "I feel at times somewhat bewildered at the numerous agencies who have a hand in it." Disorientation, as the evidence shows, generally marked the conduct of Sharifian negotiations on the British side. There was, as I describe in the first part of my book, a failure at the highest level to think the affair through in its various bearings and implications; and a failure by the minister concerned, Sir Edward Grey, and by his immediate official advisers, to exert proper control over the activities of their subordinates. This was what led me to entitle the first part of my book (which deals with the Anglo-Sharifian negotiations between 1914 and the outbreak of the Sharif's rebellion in June 1916) "The Quicksand." This title I borrowed from a minute by Sir Edward Grey, in which he sighed wearily, "This Arab question is a regular quicksand." The scattered and fragmentary nature of the voluminous archives would have had their role to play then and later in the muddle of Anglo-Arab relations.

The documents yield a picture of decisions taken in haste and in ignorance; of a Foreign Secretary clearly out of his depth and exhausted by the unremitting labor involved in conducting, under the stress and urgency of war, a worldwide foreign policy, and more often than not yielding to his forceful and impetuous colleague, Lord Kitchener; and of civil servants who, distracted by the same pressures, were incapable of remedying their master's shortcomings. But the evidence also reveals that this was not the case everywhere in Whitehall. The Secretary of State for India, Sir Austen Chamberlain, and his officials, Sir Thomas Holderness and Sir Arthur Hirtzel, showed a firm grasp of the issues and did not allow themselves to be bounced by eagerness or panic into ill-considered judgments. The evidence is most striking when it refers to the judgments and actions of the British officials in Egypt and the Sudan: McMahon; Storrs; G. F. Clayton, who was in charge of Intelligence; his colleague Kinahan Cornwallis; and Sir Reginald Wingate, the Governor-General of the Sudan. They are seen to be either incompetent and negligent, or frivolous, or injudicious, or overeager and fanciful.

But if the archives do enable us to paint a rich, detailed picture of Anglo-Sharifian negotiations and of the context and ambience in which these took place, they do leave some crucial questions unanswered. It is likely that they will remain unanswered, unless a hitherto unknown hoard of papers should be discovered. As has been said above, the papers do not disclose who originated the idea that the Arab state in Syria should comprise Damascus, Homs, Hama, and Aleppo. What the documents show is that McMahon informed the Foreign Secretary that the Arabs would insist on "boundaries . . . leaving in Arabia purely Arab districts of Aleppo, Damascus, Hama and Homs." Grey agreed that an offer to the Sharif should be made in these terms, but McMahon, without any authority or subsequent explanation, departed from the terms he himself had suggested and Grey had authorized. Instead, in his letter of October 24, 1915, he told the Sharif that he was excluding

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from the area of Arab independence—on the score that "they cannot be said to be purely Arab"—"the portions of Syria lying to the West of Damascus, Homs, Hama and Aleppo." That McMahon had departed from his instructions had not been known or suspected before. But though the archives disclose this change of phrasing—a change that was the origin of the controversies for which the McMahon-Husayn correspondence became notorious—the file which might have shown who in Cairo suggested this change, and for what reason, is missing, and our knowledge on this important point must remain—perhaps forever—incomplete.

As the full extent of the complication and muddle in Anglo-Sharifian negotiations gradually became clearer to me, the idea which Leonard Stein's letter had conjured up in my mind began to have increasingly more point. No longer was it simply that the McMahon-Husayn correspondence might have a history of subsequent interpretation which a student might want to elucidate. Rather, that student, faced with a transaction which was in great part obscurity and equivocation, was irresistibly drawn to ask: What did the various interested parties make of these texts afterward, and how did they understand their sibylline promises? It was, of course, well known that after the war the correspondence became involved in the Palestine problem—a problem which did not exist when the letters were exchanged and with which they did not set out to deal. As I soon discovered when pursuing the fortunes of the correspondence following the Sharifian uprising, the letters became a matter of controversy very soon after the last one in the series was dispatched and received—and this in relation to a range of issues which had nothing to do with Palestine. And following the trail of the correspondence in the files between 1916 and 1939—when the letters were officially published—led me to write the second part of my book, which in fact proved to be slightly longer than the first.

This second part I entitled "The Fly in the Fly-Bottle." I took the expression from the philosopher Wittgenstein. In a well-known passage in his *Philosophical Investigations* he likened men caught in philosophical dilemmas to flies in a bottle from which they struggle in vain to escape until the philosopher shows them the way out—shows them that it is pseudo problems with which they are struggling. The analogy between such puzzlement and the muddles that ministers and officials got into in their various attempts to establish what had been agreed between McMahon and the Sharif seemed particularly apt. For between 1916 and 1939, as I discovered, one interpretation after another was suggested by various British officials in Cairo and London. All of them, except one, failed badly in putting together the evidence available in their own files, and in considering the meaning and implications of this evidence. The one—partial—exception was W. J. Childs of the Foreign Office, who in 1930 produced an extensive memorandum in an attempt to answer the question whether Palestine had or had not been included in the territories promised to the Sharif. Childs was diligent and intelligent and had some historical imagination. But even he failed to look at all the available evidence and failed to be critical enough in his scrutiny of it.

The second part of my book can thus be called a historiographical inquiry, in contrast to the first, which may be described as a historical one. We are justified in speaking of the official historiography of the McMahon-Husayn correspondence since, as the evidence shows, almost all the officials who set out to explain the meaning of the correspondence did so in a genuinely historical spirit. They really wanted to discover what actually took place, not to make a political point or defend an established political position. This is all the more intelligible in view of the fact that they were writing exclusively for the eyes of their colleagues and political masters. The only civil servant who can be said to have deliberately bent the evidence was the Foreign Office official who sported the name of Lacy Baggallay (and who in 1940 investigated Toynbee's claim that the Jews had suppressed his conclusions). During the so-called Palestine Round Table Conference of 1939, Baggallay was responsible for compiling a White Paper on "Statements made on behalf of His Majesty's Government during the year 1918 in regard to the Future Status of certain parts of the Ottoman Empire." By judicious cutting and rearrangement Baggallay very skillfully made a report that had been written

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by D. G. Hogarth in 1918 say the contrary of what its author had meant to say. Baggallay's activities here amounted to falsification. But it can be said that the fraud which he practiced was in furtherance of a policy already adopted. This policy of cutting loose from the Zionist commitment was, however, adopted partly because he and other officials and political figures genuinely believed the historical record indicated that Palestine had been promised to the Sharif. And this, in a way, is the more serious charge against Baggallay: that his duty as an official required him to have an accurate knowledge of the historical record and that, out of incompetence, he failed in this duty and thus misled his superiors.

In the course of pursuing through the records the historiography of the McMahon-Husayn correspondence, I of course once again came upon the "Commitments" memorandum which I had first encountered when writing *England and the Middle East*. It was indeed written by Toynbee, as Leonard Stein had told me. But the documents gave almost no indication of the sources on which he had relied, or of the stages by which he developed his argument. The fact that, as he stated in an autobiographical passage published in 1967, he had to work in great haste in order to produce this memorandum, together with a series of similar memoranda, meant perhaps that he had had little leisure properly to digest, or even to track down, all the relevant documents, scattered as they were in the files—files to which a card index, still in use at the Public Record Office, would have been a somewhat unreliable guide. In this memorandum he declares, without any doubt or qualification, that Palestine was included in the territories promised to the Sharif. We get a glimpse of his reasoning on the subject in a minute written at the same time in which he says that Palestine was "implicitly" included in the Sharif's original demands, and not "explicitly" excluded by McMahon. This view of McMahon's promises depended on a particular interpretation of his words in that famous letter. McMahon, as we have seen, was authorized to offer boundaries "leaving in Arabia purely Arab districts of Aleppo, Damascus, Hama and Homs." But, as we have also seen, he inexplicably disregarded his instructions and excluded from his offer "the portions of Syria lying to the West of Damascus, Homs, Hama and Aleppo." Both formulations were somewhat vague, and certainly did not allow a boundary to be exactly delimited. To go with his memorandum, Toynbee prepared a map on which he joined the four towns by a line that he proceeded to prolong northward and southward in such a manner that McMahon's words were translated into a precise boundary; further, the line was prolonged southward in such a manner that the area later known as Palestine was included in the territories promised to the Sharif. What was Toynbee's warrant for doing so? Certainly not McMahon's words—still less the instructions which he should have followed and which he disregarded. Toynbee, it would seem, had no warrant, but most likely he was relying on the authority of an earlier interpretation that—perhaps in the press of urgent business and working, as he later put it, "desperately hard against time"—he assumed without evidence to be a sound one.

This interpretation occurred in a memorandum produced in April 1916 by the newly established Arab Bureau in Cairo. The memorandum purported to set out and summarize negotiations with the Sharif and their outcome. It offered the view that, "subject to undefined reservations" relating to French interests, McMahon had offered the Sharif an area "understood to be bounded N by about Lat. 37°, East by the Persian frontier, South by the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean, West by the Red Sea and the Mediterranean up to about Lat. 33° and beyond by an indefinite line drawn inland West of Damascus, Homs, Hama and Aleppo." None of this, needless to say, had been mentioned in McMahon's letter, which had deliberately fought shy of any precision and which contained no mention of Latitude 37° or Latitude 33°. The latter location is approximately that of Haifa, and the memorandum was therefore simply asserting, on no evidence whatever, that the whole area traditionally known in the West as Palestine was included in McMahon's offer. Between McMahon's original instructions and this document the gap had become unbridgeable. The memorandum was anonymous, and, again, no evidence in the voluminous archives exists to indicate its author, who will probably remain forever unknown. Its significance is great, since it inaugurated the two decades and more of a veritable labyrinth of

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official historiography in which officials and ministers were hopelessly lost. Hence the title of my book, and the other epigraph which, together with the passage by G. M. Young, stands at its head. Drawn from Plutarch's life of Theseus, it says in effect that the Cretans "will not allow the Labyrinth to have been anything but a prison, which had no other inconvenience than this, that those who were confined there could not escape." What the study has, in brief, suggested is that (apart from Childs, who had the genuine qualities of a historian, and Baggallay, whom political passion made slightly sinister and who showed some talent as a forger) the officials who had to inquire at various times into the correspondence were simply incompetent in their pursuit of knowledge—knowledge vital to the conduct of policy. Whether this had to do with their native abilities, or the quality of their minds, is an open question. But the fact is that as officials they were members of a hierarchical organization in which junior deferred to senior—and had many reasons for doing so; in which *idées reçues* had all the weight of precedent behind them; and in which, therefore, curiosity and inquisitiveness were discouraged. None of which, in brief, is conducive to historiographical inquiry, however important for policy such inquiry might be.

I began by saying that *In the Anglo-Arab Labyrinth* is, according to the classifications of bibliographers, a work of diplomatic history. But unquestionable as such tidy classifications may seem, yet they are in fact less cut-and-dried, more problematic and questionable than at first sight they appear to be. The book, it is true, may be considered as a contribution to the history of Anglo-Arab relations, but it is also an inquiry into the genesis of a bunch of letters and of the successive metamorphoses which their meaning underwent during a period over two decades—metamorphoses such that what the correspondence was understood to signify in 1939 was far removed from what its authors had in mind in 1914–15. Viewed in this light, the first part of the book may be seen, in some ways, to fall into the same category as J. L. Lowes's *Road to Xanadu,* while its second part belongs to the same genre as C. S. Lewis's *Studies in Words* or Denys Hay's *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea.* It can, in other words, be appropriately classified as an essay in the history of ideas—the kind of history which had been most familiar to me before I found myself writing political history in *England and the Middle East.*

So much for classifications. But for me, the author, the interest of the work was different. It did not primarily lie in its being a contribution, whether negligible or not, to the history of Anglo-Arab relations, or to the history of ideas. As I strove to puzzle out the hasty calculations and ambiguous transactions of agents lost in a murk of cross-purposes, misunderstandings, and ulterior motives, I gradually came to see my enterprise as historical in a wider sense. If I were successful, I came to think, the work would not speak only to the amateurs of Anglo-Arab relations or the students of intellectual history. It would take its place (a modest one, assuredly) among those products of the historian's art—of which Maitland's writings, say, or Joseph Levenson's, are a supreme example—which seek to restore, for whoever cares to read them, in all its singularity, the meaning of thoughts and actions now dead and gone, which once upon a time were the designs and choices of living men.

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For an Old Friend

NORBERT KRAPF

What a cruel way to learn
the news! The hometown newspaper,
arriving well after the fact,
tactfully placed your picture
and story on the second page.
I almost overlooked it that late
Friday afternoon when I settled
in, tired, for the weekend.
The same fine features I remember
from ten years ago, the look of
the hometown boy destined to go
far, very far. But, for whatever
reasons, you came back home
from New York. You came back
to the town you once loved,
but could no longer accommodate
your needs, couldn't even give
you the simple urge to keep
breathing. You were drinking
heavily, I hear. Last time I
saw you, at the town library,
you appeared on the street with
a flushed face, said hello,
offered a nervous hand, hurried
back home through the alley.
I still cannot believe what
I read. I cannot accept
even the idea of you hanging
from a belt in the bedroom.
I want to sing you back out
of the darkness, onto your feet.

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I want to release the tension
around your throat and sing
the breath of life back into
your lungs, hear that whiplash
wit, listen to deaf Beethoven's
ecstatic last symphony as we
sip from mugs of beer, argue
American literature, discuss
the merits of various cuisines.
But it's no use, Jeff. The poem
is always too much after the fact.

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Irving Babbitt: Crusader

DOUGLAS BUSH

Irving Babbitt (1865–1933), who openly scorned conventional scholarship and antiquarian research, was made well aware of being a sort of pariah in his own department of French as well as beyond it; he was not given a full professorship until 1912. But the numbers of his students, both undergraduate and graduate, steadily increased as the word spread that he was not merely a scholar but a personality, an evangelist, and a stout fighter. His concentration on ideas, central ideas, and his complete integrity attracted even students who recoiled from his doctrines.

He would arrive in class with his green bag bursting, dump a heap of books on his desk, and set about saving souls. Students took to making up a jackpot for whoever came nearest to guessing the number of authors he would cite during the hour. The habit of calling a string of witnesses was not pedantry, nor—since most of them were dead—was it ostentatious name-dropping. He needed them as examples of misguided thought and feeling, and these were much more abundant than examples of wisdom. To his hearers, many words and phrases that he used in rather special senses became familiar and, for examinations and term papers, they were invaluable nuts and bolts. In my day I heard of a worried graduate student who went about moaning, "If I could only get hold of the vocabulary!" Babbitt's voice and manner carried the full urgency of his message—even if his pronunciation of French, as Richard Eberhart once attested in a poem, was not quite Parisian. Babbitt did not reserve his big guns for big targets but might turn them upon butterflies. He could explode over Kipling's "Mandalay": "The temple bells are calling the faithful to meditation, but they're calling the nostalgic British soldier back to 'a neater, sweeter maiden in a cleaner, greener land.' " As W. Jackson Bate has remarked, for Babbitt "even a little yearning was a dangerous thing." Of course he had his own ardent yearning for other goals than Mandalay; he recalled Kipling's piece, by the way, in his late essay on Buddha.

My personal acquaintance with Babbitt was very small. When in 1921 I came to Harvard for two years of graduate work, I was so involved with required philological courses that I could squeeze in very little literature of any kind. Also, being then a sort of Romantic (in spite of long and happy immersion in Latin and Greek in school and college), I was prejudiced against Babbitt; my wiser friends were his loyal supporters, some with reservations. My loss was partly made up by a considerable change of heart during the next few years; and, while I was teaching at the University of Minnesota, I was glad to hear that some journalistic pieces of mine had commended themselves to the great man.

Although I had only secondhand knowledge of Babbitt's teaching, I was in the same room with him on several occasions which have some tiny anecdotal interest. At one of the regular meetings of Harvard graduate students in literature, John Livingston Lowes (my mentor) read a chapter from his work in progress, *The Road to Xanadu*; the subject and the speaker had drawn Babbitt out of his normal seclusion. When the reading was over, two groups formed around their respective heroes at opposite ends of the room; the ensuing forceful debate between the central figures recalled P. G. Wodehouse's image of

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two mastodons trumpeting at each other across a primeval swamp. When Babbitt annihilated the "Ancient Mariner" by citing a Shakespearian tragedy, Lowes replied, "In the house of poetry there are many mansions." To which Babbitt, his eyes gleaming with the birth of a triumphant exit line, returned, "But they're not all on the same floor," and marched out. He remembered this exchange in his essay on Coleridge in *On Being Creative.*

A second occasion, in or about 1926, was the bringing together of Babbitt and an already distinguished visitor, I. A. Richards, by a group of Harvard tutors. Richards minutely interpreted "A Cooking Egg" (Eliot's poems had not yet yielded all their arcane secrets to explicators), and as the analysis proceeded Babbitt's face grew longer and longer. At the end he ejaculated, "I call that a puzzle, not a poem." Another time a similar group had prevailed on him to give them an evening and the guest of honor kept it alive. The few remarks I ventured were well received and doubtless brought on a touch of hubris that invited disaster. When Babbitt remarked on the dearth of good criticism in American periodicals, I asked if the *New Republic* and the *Nation* didn't hold up pretty well, and mentioned Edmund Wilson's "The All-Star Literary Vaudeville" (which had appeared in the *New Republic*, June 30, 1926). Babbitt, rocking and rumbling like Dr. Johnson, demanded fiercely, "Do you remember what he said about Paul Elmer More?" I had forgotten that, and I felt like the hapless clergyman who, querying a verdict of Johnson's, spoke of Dodd's sermons. But Babbitt could be magnanimous toward sinners more grievous than I had been. R. P. Blackmur told me once that his family and Babbitt's were neighbors in Cambridge and that, when he had just published a blast against his elder, he saw Babbitt approaching on the street and tried to shrink into invisibility. But his formidable victim stopped him: "You know, Richard, you don't need to feel apologetic about attacking me." It was, I may add, a pleasant thing to observe the sage in meditation as he perambulated Cambridge streets, his head bent, his eyes downcast, until, reaching a curb, he picked up the skirts of his topcoat in both hands and trotted to the opposite curb, to resume his inward life.

Since in these days most people have forgotten those old battles and perhaps Babbitt's books as well, and since I, unlike other recent assessors, have no talent for high philosophical discourse, this article will be a simple, concrete sketch of his writings and principles, his solid virtues and sundry liabilities.

It is doubtless not remarkable, Babbitt's ideas having been so long in incubation, that his first book, *Literature and the American College: Essays in Defense of the Humanities* (1908), should contain, even in the first two of its nine essays, so much of what was to be his lifelong message. The first one asked, "What Is Humanism?" The basis of Renaissance humanism was, of course, devotion to a now enlarged body of Latin and Greek literature, and the label "litterae humaniores" distinguished writings concerned mainly with secular man and society from medieval preoccupation with Christian faith and theology. But those two great bodies of writing were seen as complementary rather than opposed; the light of supernatural faith could be supported, on the ethical and even the religious plane, by the God-given light of human reason. This kind of Christian humanism persisted, with growing strength, from the Middle Ages onward; it is epitomized in the richest phrase Erasmus ever struck out: "Sancte Socrates, ora pro nobis." But, as Christianity had its multiplying divisions within both Catholic and Protestant folds, so early humanism developed along various and sometimes conflicting lines, purely literary and rhetorical, historical, educational, and philosophical; and Cicero, the revered stylist and moralist, was also a model of civic service. Representatives of such varied interests ranged from Christian orthodoxy through deism, indifferentism, active skepticism, and, for a few, neopaganism.

Babbitt, without going far into these developments, moves onto his own ground in saying that Cicero's conception of *humanitas* as meaning both self-discipline and selective sympathy underwent in later antiquity a slighting of self-discipline in favor of undiscriminating sympathy and altruism. Babbitt's concern is the larger gap created in and since the eighteenth century, the melting of "humanist" into "humanitarian." Babbitt, of course, repudiates such confusion. (In the years when I attended faculty meetings, I

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now and then heard scientists falling into it.) Generalizing in terms of his own creed, Babbitt concludes that "the humanist, as we know him historically, moved between an extreme of sympathy and an extreme of discipline and selection, and became humane in proportion as he mediated between these extremes." Socrates attained perfect harmony between thought and feeling; Rousseau, who said that his heart and his head did not seem to belong to the same individual, exemplified the difference between a sage and a sophist. "For most practical purposes, the law of measure is the supreme law of life, because it bounds and includes all other laws"; hence Buddha, "in the opening sentence of his first sermon," proclaims "that extremes are barbarous." (It is significant that Babbitt's last book was *The Dhammapada Translated from the Pāli with an Essay on Buddha and the Occident*, 1936; the essay had been written in 1927.) "The human mind," Babbitt declares, "if it is to keep its sanity, must maintain the nicest balance between unity and plurality," the One and the Many of Plato—the cosmic ideas of pre-Socratic philosophy being redefined in earthly terms. And Babbitt returns to an utterance of Emerson that he wholly endorses, words that he took as an epigrath for *Literature and the American College:*

> There are two laws discrete
> Not reconciled,—
> Law for man, and law for thing;
> The last builds town and fleet,
> But it runs wild,
> And doth the man unking.

The second essay in this first book, "Two Types of Humanitarians: Bacon and Rousseau," is a specific illustration of the two principal ways in which traditional humanism was broken down in the modern centuries. Bacon was "a perfect example of the scientific naturalist and humanitarian," Rousseau a perfect example of "sentimental naturalism." The doctrines these men represented glorified, respectively, the quest for power over nature and the rejection of all restraints upon individual impulse. Such conceptions of uncontrolled progress and uncontrolled liberty, working in all directions, have been the undoing of modern civilization. Babbitt denies what was to become a common charge, that he was a reactionary arraigning the modern spirit.

> No sane person would set out to belittle the immense achievements of science since the Renaissance, and still less that great quickening and broadening out of sympathy during the last two centuries so as to include not only the disinherited among men, but even the animals. The more scientific progress and the more social pity the better. Exception can be taken to these things only when they are set up as absolute and all-sufficient in themselves; when the Baconian would substitute quantitative and dynamic for human standards, or the Rousseauist would exalt social pity into the place of religious restraint as the very keystone of the arch of human nature. The "law for man" suffers in both cases. . . .

Readers of Babbitt's books, including his opponents, may forget such words because many scattered phrases may seem to contradict them or to be less than fair or adequate. His "villains" of thought and feeling tend to shed his qualifications (Rousseau very rarely gets any) and become one-dimensional symbols of the ideas he abhors. And broad labels can be applied as if they were precise; Babbitt uses the word "humanitarian" as if it were a generally accepted term of damnation. He can make dubious inferences. We may grant that Rousseau's deplorable private conduct grew "directly" out of "his idea of liberty," but not the parallel assertion that "Bacon failed morally, not in spite of his idea of progress, but as a result of it." This allusion to Bacon's accepting gifts from suitors in his court is surely a non sequitur; many men before Bacon took bribes without practicing his rectitude in decisions. Bacon is acknowledged to be "in many respects . . . a humanist of the Renaissance," though the instance given, his "humanistic disdain for the multitude," is not the happiest choice. He is credited, rightly, with a fear that pursuit of "the natural light" of science might weaken attachment to the supreme light of revelation. Babbitt's own attitude toward religion appears in the remark that "so far as Shakespeare fails to allow sufficiently for religion and the sense of a central unity that it imparts to life, he falls short of being completely humane."

I have lingered with part of Babbitt's first book because, as I said, it is such a clear statement, both earnest and witty, of his lifelong

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creed. In it he uses many of the terms which were to become his hallmarks, and invokes many of the witnesses he was to cite on behalf of humane discipline and insight: Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Buddha, Montaigne (in his basic, not his naturalistic, moods), Pascal, Dr. Johnson, Matthew Arnold, and others. For the kernel of his doctrine one might quote these words:

> Little seems likely to survive of the idea of liberal culture if it is left on the one hand to the Baconian, who neglects the "law for man" entirely, and on the other to the Rousseauist, who confounds this law with his own temperament. What is important in man in the eyes of the humanist is not his power to act on the world, but his power to act upon himself. This is at once the highest and most difficult task he can set himself if carried out with reference to a humane principle of selection, or what amounts to the same thing, to a true principle of restraint.

Babbitt goes on to cite a Buddhist proverb about the man who conquers himself as being the greatest of conquerors; and he might have cited Montaigne, Milton, and others to the same effect, all the way back to Hesiod's lines on the difficult Hill of Virtue. Such utterances may of course be dismissed as copybook maxims, but past centuries cherished them as noble ideals, even if ours has not.

Babbitt's first book consisted of separate essays, all united by their concern with aberrations from true humanism. His subsequent books were consecutive discussions of single though complex subjects, but all were intended as links "in a continuous argument." In the preface to the second one, *The New Laokoon: An Essay on the Confusion of the Arts* (1910), he said that its material had for eight or ten years been the basis of one of his Harvard courses. In my time of graduate study it was often said that it didn't much matter which of Babbitt's courses one took, since the central theme was always the same; to adapt, without altogether perverting, a line of Shakespeare: one touch of naturalism makes the whole world kin. Babbitt's books, like the old ballads, grew by incremental repetition, and they gained weight and authority from the widening scope of his unswerving purpose.

The century and a half since Lessing's famous book had brought a thorough reaction against neoclassical formalism and the rise and final predominance of "sentimental and scientific naturalism" in thought, literature, and all the arts—an "excess" from which Babbitt sees the Western world still suffering. In his view, that revolution in theory and practice meant the relaxing of rational restraints on individual spontaneity, the subliminal uprush of violent emotion and passion, the subrational cultivation of instinct, sensibility, reverie, fantasy, the wonderful, the mystical or pseudomystical, the seeking and rendering of sensations for their own sake—all the manifold extravagances and excesses represented by Wagner and Rimbaud, Zola and Huysmans, and many others. We may be carried away by Babbitt's sweeping arraignment and yet, granted his fundamental soundness, we may at times wish that the restrictions imposed by his method did not give quite so strong an impression of one-sidedness, that his culprits were allowed more freedom to present their case.

Babbitt's third book, *The Masters of Modern French Criticism* (1912), is probably his best-balanced work, the best single display of his best qualities. The subjects of the ten chapters (and a lengthy "Conclusion") are Madame de Staël, Joubert, Chateaubriand, three minor writers who illustrate "the transition to Sainte-Beuve," Sainte-Beuve himself, who gets two chapters (up to and after 1848), Scherer, Taine, Renan, and Brunetière. Thus the analytical survey takes us from "the best type of the Rousseauistic enthusiast at the beginning of the nineteenth century" to the dogmatic, conservative logician at the end of it.

The analysis of French critical theory and practice takes account of the philosophic movements of the European mind (and some American minds, from Emerson to William James). But, though the book is a rounded, scholarly study of its subject, its method and tone are not in the vein of dry objectivity; its learning is deployed, as always, in the active service of ideas, ideas vital not only for literary critics and philosophers but for mankind at large. Babbitt's much-meditated conception of true humanism and his concern over its deliquescence require the constant exercise of his own judgment, the presentation of the philosophical and especially the ethical grounds for his frequent censure and less frequent praise. Throughout, he exemplifies his

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strong belief in the necessity for distinctions and discriminations, the lack of which blurs the thinking and feeling of so many people who have been called, or have called themselves, humanists. Yet, notwithstanding the urgency of his convictions, Babbitt is here uncommonly temperate and fair-minded in his assessments, recognizing intellectual and even aesthetic virtues wherever they appear.

Since Rousseau figured often in Babbitt's first book and constantly in his second, we are not surprised that in the third he is the evil genius whose enormous influence, merging with general forces of change, worked more or less throughout the nineteenth century, especially in France. Babbitt reviews the concepts and attitudes (listed above from *The New Laokoon*) which made up the whole naturalistic view of man in a world of flux and relativity. The critics surveyed were not quite unanimous. Joubert—whom Arnold had brought before English readers "in one of the best critical essays ever written in English"—wins Babbitt's almost unqualified respect because, although he recognized the facts of change and instability, he was preserved from naturalism by his spiritual and Platonic sense of the fixed and permanent, the unity above plurality.

Sainte-Beuve, the universal doctor, had wide learning, critical curiosity, and acuteness. His biographical approach to literature exploited "A marvellous psychological finesse in seizing and rendering the living individual"; and although "his humanism is largely a matter of feeling," he disliked "the dehumanizing tendencies of an excessive naturalism." If he was less fully effectual than he might have been, it was because he was a skeptical and aesthetic relativist, " 'holding no form of creed, / But contemplating all.' "

While Sainte-Beuve believed in scientific progress, it was Taine, "a disillusioned romanticist" and "scientific positivist," who tried to make literary history and criticism scientific and sociological by erecting psychological laws on the basis of the moment, the race, and the milieu. The workings of the triple formula appear at their best and worst in his history of English literature. In general, "He revels in a rampant naturalism" and implies "determinism or scientific fatalism"; "both nature and human nature can be brought under a common law."

The intellectually emancipated Renan "carried over to science all the mental habits of Catholicism." His hope for a new philosophy of man came from the new historical sense, "the chief acquisition and distinctive originality of the nineteenth century." But Renan's rejection of the supernatural, his relativism and aestheticism, made him incapable of understanding Jesus, much less St. Paul. He sacrificed "the masculine religion of the will . . . to the feminine religion of the heart," which, for him, reduced "the mission of Jesus, so far as possible, to sentimental and humanitarian effusions."

Apropos of Renan, Babbitt says that "Flexibility of intelligence and breadth of sympathy come more and more to take the place of authority and judgment as the chief virtues of the critic." Those older virtues were reborn, after a fashion, in Brunetière. He, combining a Calvinistic temper with a semi-Darwinian view of the historical evolution of ideas, literature, and genres, became the champion of French classicism and the foe of nearly all kinds of modernism, naturalistic or impressionistic. Whereas Renan had broken away from the Catholic church, Brunetière found in it a citadel of order and authority above the individual, an anchorage against the rising tide of the century's skeptical relativism. While Babbitt condemns the naturalistic excesses of various critics, he also, perhaps unexpectedly, sees that such a reaction against oversimple Romantic idealism showed the need for a saner outlook than that inherited from the "crude dualism" of the medieval tradition. "The problem," he says in his "Conclusion," "is to find some middle ground between Procrustes and Proteus; and this right mean would seem to lie in a standard that is in the individual and yet is felt by him to transcend his personal self and lay hold of that part of his nature that he possesses in common with other men."

To another summary statement, or the latter half of it, on Babbitt's last page we may perhaps give less ready assent: "Our ideal critic, then, would need to combine the breadth and versatility and sense of differences of a Sainte-Beuve with the elevation and insight and sense of unity of an Emerson." The comments on Emerson earlier in the book do not altogether prepare us for his enthronement here. Moreover, instead of his

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wishful desideratum, Babbitt had already given to Goethe an ideal status. Goethe

> comes nearer than any other modern to what we are seeking; not the romantic or scientific Goethe, it should be added, but the humanistic Goethe, who is revealed in the conversations with Eckermann and others, and in the critical utterances of his later years. As an actual practitioner of the art of criticism, he seems to me inferior to the best of the Frenchmen; but as an initiator into the critical habit of mind he is incomparable.

In *Rousseau and Romanticism* (1919), the fourth book in Babbitt's "continuous argument," Rousseau is again conspicuous as the prime agent and symbol of an international movement which—though widely, and in part rightly, regarded as a new liberation for Western man—appeared to Babbitt as inaugurating a new kind of slavery. The "religion of nature," for example, found the highest wisdom in intoxicated dreaming of the infinite, in glorifying the instinctive and subrational instead of the "law for man," the acceptance of limits, and the guidance of the ethical will. The many thinkers and poets do not receive rounded estimates, which, Babbitt says, would have been more favorable; he only gathers illustrations of the dangers of "emotional naturalism," which rebels against the traditional humanism, the rational consciousness that he exalts in his three chief masters: Aristotle, Confucius, and Buddha. Babbitt does not deny all light and virtue to the Romantic writers; he rejects some of their main tenets because he dislikes their narcissistic fruits. "The establishment of a sound type of individualism is indeed the specifically modern problem." Here as elsewhere Babbitt distinguishes three levels of experience—naturalistic, humanistic, and religious. While he respects the third, he espouses the second; his creed is founded on "the secular experience of both the East and the West." All this does not mean that Babbitt clings to an impossible ideal of fixity for man and the world. On the contrary, he insists on the fact of perpetual change, but he also insists that the necessary and perpetual adaptation to that fact must not blindly dismiss the sound insights of the past, the inward bulwark against self-deception, confusion, and chaos. Since Babbitt has so often been accused of cold moralism, I quote from the introduction a passage which shows the emotional and imaginative fire, the passionate concern for man, that burns below the rational surface:

> In the "Masters of Modern French Criticism" I was above all preoccupied with the problem of the One and the Many and the failure of the nineteenth century to deal with it adequately. My effort in this present work is to show that this failure can be retrieved only by a deeper insight into the imagination and its all-important rôle in both literature and life. Man is cut off from immediate contact with anything abiding and therefore worthy to be called real, and condemned to live in an element of fiction or illusion, but he may, as I have tried to show, lay hold with the aid of the imagination on the element of oneness that is inextricably blended with the manifoldness and change and to just that extent may build up a sound model for imitation.

Democracy and Leadership (1924) was Babbitt's final full-scale application of his principles, this time to political and social theory and action of the past and present, abroad and at home. The substance of the book might be pretty much surmised by readers who had followed his earlier writings. Its presiding oracles are, as before, Aristotle, Buddha, and Confucius; Burke is often cited and, less predictably, Jesus. The villain of course is Rousseau—that is, the whole Rousseauistic movement. But while, as usual, Babbitt calls a cloud of witnesses, mostly wrongheaded, he takes more account of the democratic masses and their ways of thought and feeling; and as usual he affirms the necessity of "a certain quality of will, a will that is felt in its relation to his ordinary self as a will to refrain," of observance of the law of measure, of ethical standards as opposed to humanitarian relativity. The failure to achieve standards had been the special theme of the book on French critics. *Rousseau and Romanticism* had stressed the problem of the imagination, which "holds the balance of power between the higher and the lower nature of man" and can therefore sway him toward order or anarchy. Man must "discover in life somewhere an abiding unity with which to measure its mere variety and change."

It would be hard to think of an American professor of literature who became so controversial a figure as Babbitt. As a teacher at

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Harvard for nearly forty years, he attracted a growing band of young men who became teachers themselves and joined with other academic allies in propagating what came to be known as the "New Humanism." Opponents, academic and nonacademic, published more or less angry books and reviews, not always with full comprehension of what they were attacking. While most literary debates, even on first principles, have been largely confined to the literary and/or academic communities, the New Humanism for a time got into general periodicals and newspapers and cocktail chatter. At least one jocose drawing in *The New Yorker* registered the fact of public awareness, if not of understanding or respect. It may be noted that Babbitt was probably best known to European intellectuals.

The eclipse of his general fame or notoriety was brought about by various causes. One external cause was the devastating depression of the decade after 1929, which turned the public mind away from Babbitt's concerns to immediate practical problems. The internal causes are of more lasting interest. In the introduction to *Democracy and Leadership* (1924), Babbitt defended himself against the triple charge that his method had been "negative, extreme, and one-sided." With the partial exception of his book on French critics, he had never attempted rounded estimates of either individuals or historical epochs because his sufficiently large and complex subject had been the varieties and the extent of naturalism, not a general history of thought. He had dwelt persistently on "the aspect of human nature that the naturalists have no less persistently neglected." His preaching the necessity of restraint, of moral choice, and of standards demanded the constant exercise of the negative will, the "inner check," not weak compromises between right and wrong. But he regrets that his method should make him "appear so constantly unamiable." We might have expected—and forgiven—a less temperate response from a dedicated and temperamentally explosive prophet who had encountered so much hostility. A dozen years earlier, before the chorus of opposition had grown strong, Babbitt had quoted from Brunetière a sentence which had perhaps stirred thoughts of himself: "It is a sort of joy for a man to stand apart in the midst of an indifferent or hostile society, living in it and belonging to it, but judging it." And he had added, "Of this austere joy Brunetière must have had his fill, especially if, as his friends claim, he was very far from being steeled to the inevitable reprisals." Whatever wounds Babbitt felt, he had continued to expound his doctrine with undiminished vigor.

It must be granted that the intense earnestness of Babbitt's ethical commitment does make him appear, if not "constantly unamiable," at least deficient in aesthetic sensibility and in the breadth and warmth of sympathetic understanding that even sinners need. He was not without those qualities, but they were too often submerged or blunted by his overriding concerns. Some of his comments on Keats illustrate these shortcomings; but first it might be remarked that we cannot imagine him, like Arnold, describing as "a moral idea" the line "For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair." One passage in *Rousseau and Romanticism* is representative. Keats, Babbitt says,

> may serve as a type of the new imaginative spontaneity and of the new fullness and freshness of sensuous perception. If Johnson is wise without being poetical, Keats is poetical without being wise. . . . Keats has written lines that have high seriousness. He has written other lines which without being wise seem to lay claim to wisdom. . . .

Of the latter kind is Keats's identification of truth with beauty, which of course has been much debated but which at least the Arnold of "high seriousness" strongly endorsed. Babbitt's comment is either facetious or inept: Helen of Troy "was beautiful, but was neither good nor true." "In general, however," he proceeds, "Keats's poetry is not sophistical. It is simply delightfully recreative." (Opposite this last sentence, in the Widener Library copy, a vexed reader has written an exclamation mark and "grrr.") Babbitt goes on to speculate about what Keats's future might have been and decides that he "would have succumbed . . . to some of the forms of sham wisdom current in his day, especially the new humanitarian evangel." "His attempt," he adds, "to rewrite *Hyperion* from a humanitarian point of view is a dismal failure." Babbitt's occasional failures in sympathetic comprehension can chill and alienate readers. Yet, whatever virtues he lacks, he normally

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has an abundance of a quality less plentiful among our contemporary academic critics: namely, common sense.

Edmund Wilson, in his warm celebration of Christian Gauss (THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, Summer 1952), disposed thus of Gauss's opposite: "A teacher like Irving Babbitt was a dogmatist who either imposed his dogma or provoked a strong opposition." Presumably the author of *The Wound and the Bow* did not consider Freudian formulas dogmatic. At any rate, Wilson summed up the common, almost automatic attitude of the literary intelligentsia during and after Babbitt's lifetime. His rough judgment could be lodged against most great teachers from Jesus and Socrates (who provoked stronger opposition) on down. But people have always had enough of the old Adam to resist any effort to make them better than nature made them.

Babbitt's most famous critic was his avowed "disciple," T. S. Eliot, who presented a minority report in two essays of 1927 and 1929, the second focused on Babbitt's chief lieutenant, Norman Foerster. For Eliot the value of the humanistic doctrine, though "immense," had a fatal defect in that it stopped short of dogma and the Church, that it had no pinnacle or foundation except the secular detritus of Protestantism. (Both Babbitt and Eliot, by the way, had behind them the tradition of New England Puritanism.) For the many who lacked Eliot's religious experience, his view was even less acceptable than Babbitt's. If, Eliot said in his second essay, "this 'supernatural' is suppressed . . . , the *dualism* of man and nature collapses at once." To one who is neither theologian nor philosopher, the logic of that assertion is far from clear. Babbitt, like Arnold, appealed persuasively from man's ordinary self to his higher self, terms which have a broad and basic validity and carry implicit incentives not apparent in the "scientific" id, ego, and superego.

If this essay were a book, one could venture to glance around our present world and see the fulfillment of Babbitt's prophecies, the endless manifestations of the id and the ego—what Brunetière called the "morbid and monstrous development of the me" (a phrase Babbitt quoted) through Babbitt's accounts of "anarchical self-assertion" down to Christopher Lasch's comprehensive *The Culture of Narcissism*. Even if Babbitt, like all the world's great teachers, failed to conquer original sin, he wakened his audience out of uncritical passivity to recognize its insidious modern forms. He might be said to have worked on the homely principle attributed to Billy Sunday: "They say I rub people's fur the wrong way; I say, let the cats turn around."

There is a gulf between Babbitt's role and that of our advanced schools of criticism. These schools, foreign and American, comprise notably acute minds (and many less acute camp followers); and yet, on the whole, they seem to have pretty much abandoned both literature and life for the most subtle and—since they have created a new language—often unintelligible theorizing . . . about what? A simpleminded bystander cannot say clearly what it is about or what vital insights it provides. Babbitt was one of the long line of humanistic critics who conceived of literature as existing to teach and delight, though he used it as a teaching moralist. Like those critics—but much more insistently, because of an increasingly adverse climate—he was concerned with the ethical will and imagination as upholding standards of judgment and conduct for individuals and society; his writings, like theirs, were addressed to all educated people, not to an esoteric priesthood. Babbitt lives, or should live, as a provocative sage who speaks to our condition. He shows how and why we have reached that condition in order to drive home the lesson—to quote a humane Elizabethan's echo of Seneca—

> that unless above himself he can
> Erect himself, how poor a thing is man!

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Ptolemy on Trial

NOEL M. SWERDLOW

The principal task of the historian of science is to explain past science and describe how scientists accomplished their work. Neither part of that task is necessarily easy; and since some reading of the history of science is as close as most people ever come to learning about older science, the entire burden of its preservation and exposition falls upon the historian. Unlike literature and the arts, which possess a kind of immortality and can for the most part speak to anyone who takes the trouble to examine them with care and sensitivity, earlier science is mostly dead and mostly technical, requiring various kinds of prior knowledge just to be intelligible.

Moreover, in the course of their development the sciences have undergone changes so great that in many cases neither the methods nor even the subject matter of earlier science is self-explanatory to the reader who is familiar with contemporary science. The physics of Galileo and Newton employs mathematical techniques that dropped out of school curricula in the nineteenth century and earlier; medieval physics is conducted through a qualitative and philosophical manner of description that was made obsolete by the work of Galileo and Newton. Whatever becomes obsolete eventually becomes unintelligible, and consequently the living memory of the sciences seldom extends back more than a couple of generations.

The task of describing, or, better, of reconstructing, how earlier scientists worked—what procedures led to their discoveries, what work of their predecessors or contemporaries they made use of—is still more difficult and, when successful, the historian's finest achievement. The problem is already inherent in the subject, for scientific writing often reports only the most logical and most direct path to specific results, omitting the less organized and roundabout ways followed by the original investigations. There are occasional exceptions, however. Archimedes wrote a book called the *Method*, explaining how he was able to discover a number of important and, in some cases, surprising theorems that could later be subjected to rigorous proof. Kepler, in the *Astronomia nova*, described in detail (although not quite completely) the ingenious but very laborious and very indirect procedures he went through in analyzing the motions of Mars and the earth, through which he formulated the first two laws of planetary motion.

Yet such accounts are highly uncommon. No scientist writes for later historians, and the virtues of scientific exposition are, above all, rigor, purity, and avoidance of the superfluous. The model was already set in antiquity—for mathematics by Euclid, for everything else by Aristotle, particularly in his biological writings—and has changed very little to the present day. The historian's most challenging, and most interesting, task is to get beneath the surface of the finished work in order to reconstruct the motivation and procedures that led to its creation. The ways of doing this are diverse: sometimes through the author's notes and earlier drafts if these survive; sometimes through the work of his predecessors and contemporaries; sometimes through doing his work over again, even repeating the original observations or experiments as far as possible. Research of this kind can be very exciting, both to do and to read.

All too closely connected with explanation and reconstruction is the more problematical matter of judgment, which may be no part of

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the historian's work at all. Nevertheless, it is difficult to avoid, and if it must be done, a good deal of care is required. Obviously one does not merely compare the science of the past with that of the present, commending what agrees and condemning what does not—an uninformative exercise—but it is not easy to decide what judgment to apply to observations, procedures, and theories that have been replaced by something now considered more accurate or more true. There are, of course, some more or less objective criteria. An often quoted remark by David Hilbert is that the importance of a scientific work can be judged by the number of earlier publications it makes superfluous to read. Another criterion is durability, since a book that continues in use for possibly hundreds of years is certainly of interest. Finally, one may note to what degree a particular work is productive of further developments, opening new fields of investigation or providing new methods applicable to a variety of problems in previously unrelated subjects.

But the difficulty with such objective criteria is that they are not very interesting, and their application usually requires little more than cataloguing. While they may allow one to say what is important, they do not necessarily allow one to say what is admirable—which is, after all, what judgment is all about. For this, one must turn to more subjective criteria, inquiring into the difficulty and the significance, both contemporary and historical, of problems, and into the ingenuity and success of solutions within the bounds of contemporary knowledge and procedures. This kind of judgment the historian omits at his peril; lest he waste his time on matters of no interest or, as is often rationalized, of (only) historical interest, he should possess the knowledge and judgment to select subjects in themselves worthy of attention.

All this is by way of introduction to considering a recent study in the history of science that has taken on the difficult problems of reconstructing the work of an earlier scientist and passing judgment on its value. In the fall of 1977, *Scientific American, Science,* the *New York Times, Time,* and other publications carried a remarkable piece of news: that Ptolemy, the most notable astronomer and possibly the most notable scientist of antiquity, had committed a crime and a fraud. Ptolemy's crime was no less than fabrication of the observations upon which he based his highly technical planetary theory, a theory that endured without substantial modification until the time of Copernicus and Kepler. Perhaps this was to be expected. Conspiracy and fraud have been fashionable subjects in the last few years—museums have even held exhibitions of forgeries—and scientific fraud, while a common enough accusation at least since the last century, has recently had more than its share of headlines. Nevertheless, this accusation leveled at an eminent and respectable scientist, dead nearly two thousand years, is certainly unusual and could not but arouse considerable curiosity.

The discoverer of Ptolemy's fraud is Robert R. Newton of the Applied Physics Laboratory at The Johns Hopkins University. Mr. Newton, whose research was supported by the Department of the Navy, has set out his prosecution and verdict in a book titled *The Crime of Claudius Ptolemy* and published by The Johns Hopkins University Press. Normally a study such as Mr. Newton's would be left to the history of science journals for review; but since the case he constructs is so remarkable, perhaps the most remarkable investigation into a scientific fraud on record, and since the reputation for integrity of one of the most celebrated scientists is brought seriously into question if not entirely ruined, and since at least the summary results of his study have been brought prominently before the public forum—it seems suitable to examine here the prosecution's case against Ptolemy.

The burden of Robert Newton's book, his bill of indictment, is briefly this: *that* Ptolemy fabricated his own observations; *that* Ptolemy also fabricated earlier observations cited in his principal astronomical work, the *Almagest; that* Ptolemy's work is highly erroneous and inaccurate; *that* Ptolemy was a mediocre or incompetent astronomer whose work was characterized by "ignorance," "laziness," "carelessness or even slovenliness"; *that* Ptolemy contributed nothing of value to astronomy; *that* Ptolemy "lies about what he has done, and his elaborate description of his procedures is false"; *that* all modern astronomy or chronology depending in any way upon Ptolemy's work is useless and must be redone; *that* Ptolemy's book "has done more damage to astronomy than any other work ever writ-

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ten"; *that* Ptolemy was "the most successful fraud in the history of science"; *that* Ptolemy's actions constituted "a crime committed by a scientist against his fellow scientists and scholars, a betrayal of the ethics and integrity of his profession"; and *that*, finally, Ptolemy's crime remained virtually undetected through nearly eighteen centuries.

Claudius Ptolemaeus, the subject of this condemnation, was the Alexandrian mathematician of the second century whose writings in applied mathematics—astronomy, optics, harmonics, cartography—were evidently of such distinction as to render the works of his predecessors obsolete, since all but a few earlier writings on these subjects have disappeared. For some fifteen hundred years, until the flourishing of modern scientific investigation in the seventeenth century, Ptolemy's works provided not so much the supreme authority as the standard treatises on their subjects. In these treatises, Kepler, Galileo, and other scientists concerned with the successful application of mathematics to astronomy and physics found the very examples of scientific method that aided them in constructing the foundation of what is generally called the scientific revolution.

Such being Ptolemy's standing, it is certainly surprising after all these years to discover that his work—and his great astronomical treatise, the *Almagest*, in particular—was a fraud. It is, if true, a revelation on the order of discovering that Thucydides was a dishonest historian or Lord Mansfield a corrupt judge.

And Robert Newton is not short of answers to why Ptolemy committed so singular a crime:

> Several colleagues with whom I have discussed this work have asked what could be the motive for Ptolemy's fraud. We shall never know the actual motive, but it is not hard to think of possible ones. For example, it is possible that Ptolemy was a devotee of some religious fanatic who thought he had divined the true system of the world, and that all other truth was unimportant. In this case, Ptolemy's actions, while justified as viewed by an adherent of the fanatic, are still fraudulent as viewed by serious astronomers.
>
> Another answer is probably the most likely: Ptolemy wanted to be known as a great astronomer, perhaps as the greatest of all time. He may have found, early in his career, that he did not have the qualifications, and so he turned to the only remaining way of satisfying his ambition, which was to replace ability by fraud.

Let us consider this passage. If Mr. Newton is to be taken seriously, one must believe that there was "some religious fanatic" who held that the longitude of Mars's apogee was Cancer 25;30° in A.D. 139, that Saturn's maximum equation of center is 6;31°, that the radius of Jupiter's epicycle is 11;30 where the radius of its eccentric is 60. (In writing sexagesimal numbers, 25;30 equals 25 + 30/60, 6;31 equals 6 + 31/60, and so on.) Indeed this seems an unusual and remarkably precise religion, differing greatly in its articles of faith from any hitherto known. Or one must believe that Ptolemy thought he could show himself to be the greatest astronomer of all time by fraudulently deriving such numbers—a strange and subtle way to seek immortality.

Motives aside, let us consider the evidence. Robert Newton's evidence for Ptolemy's fraud is usually drawn from probability. The *Almagest* contains reports of well over a hundred observations which, when compared with recomputation using modern theory, turn out to be of varying degrees of precision. So Mr. Newton proceeds as follows: When an observation is inaccurate according to modern theory, he makes up a standard deviation (frequently implausibly small) for such an observation and, saying that the observation in question is in error by so-and-so-many standard deviations, computes the probability of such an error. This being small, he concludes that the observation is fraudulent. When, on the other hand, an observation is not inaccurate according to modern theory, or when two or more observations are in agreement or produce consistent results, he again makes up a standard deviation (this time larger), but now asks what is the probability of agreement within some fraction of the standard deviation. This likewise being small, he concludes once again that the observation is fraudulent. Thus whether an observation is good or bad, whether its errors are systematic or random, whether its results are consistent or not, Newton can, by applying one technique or the other, convince himself that it is fraudulent.

When his method is inapplicable, Mr. Newton warns that "where I have not shown

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fabrication, the reason may be that I have not found the appropriate test. In other words, failure to prove fabrication is not evidence of validity." Extending this argument, he says that because he has shown that some observations or parts of one observation are fraudulent, so other observations or the remainder of the one observation must also be fraudulent. Finally, when all else fails, he simply says that Ptolemy is lying—something he finds useful in impugning reports of older observations in the *Almagest*.

Having examined the prosecution's consideration of the motive and the evidence for Ptolemy's crime, let us look at his means of carrying it out. Here Robert Newton believes that Ptolemy falsified all these observations by computing backward from the completed theory of the *Almagest*, rather like a physics student working backward from his textbook to the quantities to be measured in the laboratory. This, though, raises some curious problems. Since it is principally in the solar theory and in the related theory of the precession of the equinoxes that Ptolemy reproduces the results of earlier astronomers (as he himself explains), Mr. Newton's assumption has the consequence of making the origin of most of the theory and parameters in the *Almagest* highly mysterious, since we must now believe that there was someone (the "religious fanatic"?) before Ptolemy who did honestly everything that Ptolemy did fraudulently. Why Ptolemy should sometimes confess to confirming earlier results and sometimes not is also difficult to explain. What is more, the backward computation that Ptolemy would have to have gone through to produce the *Almagest* falsely seems even more intricate than the observations and computations necessary to produce the work legitimately.

But there is more to come. According to Mr. Newton's detection of conspiracies, Ptolemy's crime went far beyond the fabrication of the observations in the *Almagest*. Newton also claims that Ptolemy not only falsified his own and earlier observations, but that in order to fabricate records of earlier observations he also falsified Greek and Babylonian chronology, even forging the Babylonian king list. This is the document, preserved in manuscripts of Ptolemy's *Handy Tables*, that, along with the observations in the *Almagest* dated to regnal years of the kings, forms the foundation of our knowledge of ancient chronology and has been confirmed again and again by cuneiform sources, a fact of which Mr. Newton appears to be imperfectly aware.

In sum, when Robert Newton says that an observation is fraudulent, he rests his case on two assumptions: (1) that his computation of a low statistical probability of the observation is conclusive evidence of its fabrication, and (2) that backward computation from preexisting theory is the means used by Ptolemy to carry out the fabrication. The application of his method can be shown by some examples.

The fundamental problem in Ptolemy's observations is that his vernal equinox of date, which marks the zero point for measurement of longitude, is slightly over one degree ahead of its correct location, and this produces a systematic error of about one degree in all his observations and resulting theory. The error follows from the fact that Ptolemy's observations of the entry of the sun into the equinoxes were about one day late. This fact has been realized for a thousand years—first by Arabic astronomers and then, in the sixteenth century, by Tycho Brahe, Christian Longomontanus, and Johannes Kepler. Now it happens that the dates of Ptolemy's equinoxes confirm precisely the approximate value for the length of the tropical year that had been established nearly three hundred years earlier by Hipparchus. This tropical year, 365 1/4 − 1/300 ^{d}, is about six minutes too long; and since it seemed odd to confirm an erroneous value, Longomontanus suggested that Ptolemy had merely computed the time of his equinoxes from Hipparchus's theory and invented corresponding observations. Longomontanus may not have been the first to devise this explanation, but it has subsequently been "discovered" several times. Mr. Newton is the most recent discoverer and, convinced of his originality, writes a couple of pages declaring his independence of earlier writers.

But his own contribution is to decide—most implausibly—that such an observation ought to be accurate to about two hours. The time of an equinox or solstice is determined by measuring the altitude of the sun as it crosses the meridian at local apparent noon. Ptolemy made such measurements with in-

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struments by which the sun throws a shadow (of no great distinctness) across a graduated scale; and since there is little chance that the sun will be exactly at the required position at noon, he must have interpolated between two observations made a day apart to find the required time. To meet Robert Newton's standards Ptolemy would have been compelled to measure the altitude at equinox to two minutes of arc—and this was clearly impossible. At the time of solstice, the meridian altitude of the sun changes by less than fourteen seconds of arc per day, and measuring this quantity, let alone any fraction of it, was obviously ridiculous.

Having set such impossible standards, Mr. Newton then pronounces Ptolemy's four observations of equinoxes and solstices in error by ten standard deviations, and computes that the probability of their being fraudulent is 10^{92} to 1. Note that Ptolemy is supposed to have carried out this elaborate fraud to show that Hipparchus's estimate for the length of the tropical year was in fact precise—thereby demonstrating, according to Newton's reasoning, that Ptolemy was a great astronomer, "perhaps the greatest of all time."

The precise determination of the times of equinoxes was difficult, and that of solstices nearly impossible because the observations require great accuracy. While this in itself does not explain the errors in Ptolemy's observations and the confirmation of an erroneous value for the length of the year, it is a long and unwarranted step to conclude that the true explanation is fraud. There is far too much we do not know about Ptolemy's observations, and whatever the explanation may be, it is unlikely to be so simple or discoverable through mere probability.

Other sorts of observations used by Ptolemy, such as the times of lunar eclipses, can be made more easily, since no very precise measurement is required. Because the moon is directly opposite the sun at the midpoint of an eclipse, by computing the longitude of the sun for the observed time and adding 180° to it, one immediately knows the longitude of the moon. Naturally, any errors in the solar theory will be carried across to the computed lunar position. Given three positions of the moon obtained in this way, it is possible—through an elegant geometrical construction possibly invented by Apollonius of Perga and first applied by Hipparchus—to find the radius of the lunar epicycle, which in turn determines the maximum lunar equation: that is, the moon's departure from uniform motion, at conjunction with and opposition to the sun. Elsewhere in the lunar orbit, as Ptolemy discovered, yet other inequalities must be taken into account. Ptolemy presents this derivation twice, using two sets of three lunar eclipses: a set observed in Babylon in 721/720 B.C. and a set he himself observed in Alexandria in A.D. 133/134/136. From these he found that the maximum equation of the lunar anomaly at conjunction or opposition is 5;1°, following from an epicycle radius of 5;15 where the radius of the circle on which the epicycle moves is 60.

Robert Newton believes these observations are fabricated, and it is instructive to examine his reasons. He first wrote on this subject in the *Quarterly Journal of the Royal Astronomical Society*, 15 (1974). There he argued that Ptolemy "fudged" the observations in order to find agreement with Hipparchus's lunar theory. Since the observed times of the eclipses correspond reasonably well with modern theory, Mr. Newton's evidence was that the stated longitude of the sun in the eclipse of A.D. 136, which he read as 344;12°, did not agree with computation from Ptolemy's solar tables, which give 344;3°, but was exactly 180° from the lunar position Newton computed from Ptolemy's lunar tables—164;12° (= 344;12° −180°), as is very nearly required at the midpoint of a lunar eclipse. "The record of 136 March 6 is especially revealing," writes Robert Newton, who takes it as proof that Ptolemy falsified the longitude of the eclipse by computation from Hipparchus's lunar theory. Using the second probability argument mentioned before, he then says, "We conclude that the ones [eclipses] he claims to have observed himself were in fact fudged, and the odds in favor of this conclusion are at least 250 to 1." Therefore Ptolemy fabricated the eclipses in order to demonstrate a lunar theory identical to that of Hipparchus.

In the time between this article and his book, however, Mr. Newton has discovered that he was mistaken about Hipparchus, for Hipparchus's maximum equation was *not* 5;1°. Instead, Hipparchus had two lunar

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models with equations of 4;34° and 5;49° (or 5;59°) respectively, as Ptolemy states clearly in *Almagest* IV, 11, the very book Newton is taking to task for its inaccuracies. That would seem to eliminate Ptolemy's reason for falsifying. Newton has also learned that he misread the text of the *Almagest;* it really reads not 344;12°, but 344 1/12°—that is, 344;5°, a perfectly acceptable rounding of the computed solar longitude of 344;3°. Finally, he has figured out that he miscomputed the position of the moon, for Ptolemy's lunar theory gives 164;5° (= 344;5° − 180°), not 164;12°. So everything is now consistent and correct, and that would seem to eliminate the evidence of falsification.

But there is more, and it throws some light on the scholarship in *The Crime of Claudius Ptolemy.* Robert Newton, who claims to use the Greek text and German translation of the *Almagest,* spends about a page excusing his former errors, explaining how unimportant they were and concluding that "errors that escape detection are likely to be unimportant." He says, among other things in his own defense, that his error about Hipparchus's lunar theory was also made by J. L. E. Dreyer, whom he originally acknowledged not at all, and that he had misread 344 1/12° as 344;12° because 1/12 and 12 are written similarly in Greek. What he fails to mention, however, is that the published English translation of the *Almagest* (1952), which is held in poor repute and is never cited by Newton, also reads 344;12°, as does the French translation. The German and Greek versions are correct, and the German is impossible to misread. There is, of course, nothing wrong with relying on a translation, but it is best to be clear about one's conduct, especially in a book devoted to the exposure of fraud. "Errors that escape detection," says Mr. Newton, "are likely to be unimportant." Perhaps, but Mr. Newton's errors were the basis of his argument that Ptolemy was a fraud. That he would now have us pardon his own errors (or those that he will admit) and still convict Ptolemy shows an odd notion of fairness.

Having realized that he had formerly built upon sand, how does Mr. Newton still manage to prove that Ptolemy falsified the lunar eclipses to agree with Hipparchus—a "discovery" he is reluctant to part with? He does it by insisting that in his earlier publication he had produced "strong evidence" that the eclipses were fabricated, and he now adduces two further sets of three eclipses mentioned by Ptolemy from 383/382 and 201/200 B.C. These had been used by Hipparchus to determine the erroneous maximum lunar equations, and Ptolemy explains that the erroneous equations resulted from Hipparchus's making chronological errors in determining the intervals of time between the eclipses. Now, Ptolemy's maximum equation of 5;1° is in fact very accurate, and Ptolemy says that when the chronological errors are corrected in Hipparchus's sets of eclipses, they too will produce the correct maximum equation. Newton, who confesses that he "cannot make much sense" out of Ptolemy's explanation, calls this "the blackest thing Ptolemy has done," and says that "because Ptolemy did not understand the situation, he falsely accuses Hipparchus of incompetence, and he alters the data to fit his model."

Mind, now, that Hipparchus's maximum equations are dead wrong and Ptolemy's equation is dead right, and, unlike Mr. Newton, Ptolemy has Hipparchus's book in front of him. So Robert Newton uses his computer and solves for the maximum equations using the corrected time intervals—finding, *mirabile dictu*, that Ptolemy told the truth. Therefore, concludes Newton, using his second probability argument, since the probability that all four sets will produce about the same result is 1 in 64000, at least three of the sets must be fabricated. But the fact is that Ptolemy neither accused Hipparchus of incompetence nor altered the data to fit his model. What he did, and did openly, was to recompute from his own theory the solar and lunar positions at the reported times of the eclipses; he then determined the corrected intervals and compared them with the ones used by Hipparchus. Since Ptolemy made it clear that the corrected intervals followed from his own theory, it is hardly surprising that Newton can derive the maximum equations from the intervals. The probability of 1 in 64000 is therefore without meaning, and the evidence of fraud has entirely vanished.

Finally, having realized that 5;1° is not Hipparchus's maximum equation, Mr. Newton explains why Ptolemy fabricated eclipses to produce it. We recall that Hipparchus's erroneous maximum equations were 4;34° and

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5;49°. Now, Newton says in all seriousness, the *average* of these is 5;11,30°, and so he reasons:

> We shall see in later parts of this work that the fabricator [Ptolemy] had a predilection for whole numbers. Thus it is quite likely that he should have chosen E = 5° on the basis of Hipparchus's work, even though this may not have been a value that Hipparchus himself ever obtained. *It is a coincidence that the round number is rather accurate.* The fabricator was not always so lucky when he chose a round number.

The emphasis has been added to bring out the logic of Robert Newton's argument. In the case of the tropical year he holds that Ptolemy fabricated observations to produce *exact* agreement with an *erroneous* value used by Hipparchus. In the case of the maximum lunar equation he wishes us to believe that Ptolemy falsified observations to produce a *round number* in *approximate* agreement with an *average* of two *erroneous* values used by Hipparchus, and *by coincidence* found a value *more precise* than any of the former, indeed a value that is *absolutely correct.* Considering that Mr. Newton bases his arguments upon probability, one wonders whether he has inquired into the probability of this remarkable coincidence.

But let us proceed to the crux of Mr. Newton's argument: his application of probability. Probability and statistics have become increasingly fashionable for dressing up history with an appearance of scientific rigor, perhaps because they can be used to prove, indifferently and in merciless detail, either the obvious or the preposterous, perhaps because numbers seem at once too impressive and too objective to question. Most of this work is a harmless sort of drudgery, a mindless counting that will at most, as S. J. Perelman says, "put a glaze like a Sung vase on your eyeball." But some of it seems to aspire to a higher degree of truth than history practiced without numbers, and therein lies the opportunity for abuse of method and self-deception. It is almost as if Lord Kelvin's famous remark, "When you cannot express it in numbers, your knowledge is of a meagre and unsatisfactory kind," has been turned around to "When you express it in numbers, you must know all about it." Unfortunately this is not true; it is as possible to speak nonsense through numbers as through words, and for this reason Robert Newton's application of probability has the value of a cautionary tale.

Generally, Newton confines himself to the "product rule" for determining the probability that a certain event will occur a certain number of times. For illustration: the probability of throwing a 1 with a single die is 1 in 6—that is, 1/6; the probability of throwing two successive 1's is $1/6 \times 1/6 = 1/36$; of three 1's $1/6^3 = 1/216$; of eight 1's $1/6^8 = 1/1679616$. The numbers become impressive very rapidly. Yet for the procedure to have any value it is necessary to know (a) the probability of a single occurrence, (b) the total number of trials, and (c) the independence of each occurrence from any other and from any common factor. Otherwise with each multiplication the numbers will become successively more meaningless. In the case of throwing an unloaded die, all three conditions are presumably met and so the method is valid. Depending upon the initial probability, the number of trials, and the independence of each occurrence, the probability of any result can range from 0 to 1, from impossibility to certainty.

It is not hard to show why such a technique is inapplicable to ancient astronomical observations. Newton believes that observations are fraudulent if they either disagree with the correct values, where "correct" means the values determined by modern theory, or if they agree with the correct values, where "correct" now means computation from Ptolemy's tables or simply agreement with each other in their results. Yet let any number of observations agree *or* disagree with the correct values, giving "correct" either definition, and we still do not know (a) the probability that a single observation will take a particular value, (b) the total number of observations from which the selection was made, or (c) whether the observations are entirely independent of each other or of factors common to all of them. How, then, can we apply the product rule? We cannot, if we wish our results to have any meaning.

But this does not stop Robert Newton. He simply makes up numbers for condition (a) by assuming whatever standard deviation or probable error he wishes—he seems to think they are equivalent—and then excuses his fic-

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tion by claiming that the individual probabilities are "conservative" (the invariable method when abusing the product rule, and a sure sign of trouble). Of the probable error for the equinoxes, he says, "It does not matter for present purposes whether it is correct or not," and goes on to advise that "the reader may make any assumption he likes about the standard deviation and the other properties of the measurement process"—this before multiplying up to 10^{92}. Nothing could show more clearly the lack of any foundation whatever in the individual probabilities. Conditions (b) selection and (c) independence he first neglects and then concludes, from his multiplication, are fraudulent. To give an example, he first makes up an initial probability of 1 in 10—that is, 1/10 that a single observation of a lunar eclipse is not fraudulent—and then he cheerfully multiplies it up to $1/10^{12}$ for the probability that twelve eclipses could be anything but fraudulent. However, it does not matter how "conservative" the initial assumption may be; when 10 is raised to the twelfth power the result is not conservative. A little nonsense raised to the twelfth power is a lot of nonsense.

In applying this method, Mr. Newton arrives at impressive odds of 1 in 1,000,000 or 10,000,000 or 100,000,000 or 1 in a billion or 6 billion or 10^{12}, 10^{14}, 10^{23}, or even the very remarkable 10^{92}, which is 1 followed by 92 zeros and exceeds Sir Arthur Eddington's famous estimate of the number of protons in the universe. This last from three equinoxes and one solstice in error by a little over a day. These extraordinary, truly astronomical odds have been achieved by a forced marriage of very primitive mathematics and doubtless a very sophisticated computer, and perhaps never could there be a clearer example of the computer adage of "garbage in, garbage out." For not only are Newton's initial probabilities without foundation, but there is no doubt that Ptolemy was in fact selecting from some substantial number of observations analyzed in preliminary work not reported in the *Almagest*, and that such prior analysis contributed to determining both his choice and his use of particular observations. Since we are either imperfectly informed or completely ignorant of how to apply the conditions of initial probability, selection, and independence to Ptolemy's observations, or indeed to any ancient observations, the application of mathematical probability to determine their value is at best highly dubious, though more likely entirely worthless.

In the end Robert Newton's judgment must be reversed, for he has in fact proved nothing. His arguments from probability are without value; his preexisting theory is mostly a fiction; his misunderstandings of the text of the *Almagest* and his errors, bad enough in the examples given here, could be multiplied twentyfold had more of his work been discussed; his notions of Ptolemy's motive are best left to his conscience.

Still, Ptolemy offers a significant and challenging subject for the historian of science: significant because his work is highly sophisticated, complex, and of unquestionable importance; challenging because in carrying out a reconstruction of what lies beneath the finished work there is little that survives from his predecessors or contemporaries that can offer any assistance, and of course Ptolemy's notes have entirely vanished. The contents of the *Almagest* represent, as mentioned earlier concerning scientific writing in general, only the finished results of Ptolemy's astronomy and the methods he believed future astronomers could use to improve the accuracy, although not the basic assumptions, of the subject. In this he was mistaken, for the detailed analyses that he carried out but did not discuss were the very steps that were necessary to further progress; and no one until Kepler ever again went through the enormous labor of starting from scratch.

Beneath the text of the *Almagest* lies a foundation of intricate checking and cross-checking, hinted at by Ptolemy in a few scattered remarks, which assured, as far as he could accomplish it, the applicability of his geometrical models and the accuracy of his parameters. Of course, the absence of all this subsidiary work from the book, much of it doubtless very indirect and redundant, and the presence of errors that were not eliminated, are what supply the opening for an accusation of fraud. But there is a deeper and more constructive way of examining the *Almagest*.

Ptolemy occasionally makes a remark about the sort of analysis that preceded or confirmed his development of a particular model of planetary motion or his selection of

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observations for setting out the derivation of parameters. Now, astronomy is an exact science, and in principle the history of the exact sciences can be exact history. It is possible, for example, through modern theory to recompute the very celestial phenomena available to Ptolemy through Babylonian and Greek observations—that is, to determine the circumstances of eclipses of the moon, phases of the planets, arcs of retrogradation and latitude, cycles of lunar and planetary motion that could have contributed and, according to Ptolemy, did contribute to his analytical work before he presented his completed theory in the *Almagest*. Given a reasonable knowledge of the astronomy and mathematics known to Ptolemy, and given an understanding of the techniques he used and the limits of accuracy he wished to, and was able to, achieve—that is, given some sensitivity into what Ptolemy could and could not do (this is crucial)—a remarkable amount of reconstruction is possible.

When examined in relation to earlier astronomy, Ptolemy's achievement is indeed impressive. It is clear from reading the *Almagest* that he found astronomy in an unsatisfactory state. Hipparchus had developed a reasonable solar theory and a flawed lunar theory; he conjectured the precession of the equinoxes, but gave up on planetary theory after determining, Ptolemy presumes, that no model within his knowledge was adequate to an accurate representation of the planet's complex motions.

Ptolemy brought an order out of chaos, not a perfect order but one that endured with only minor modifications for nearly fifteen hundred years. He corrected lunar theory and supplemented it with a new inequality, the identification and accurate description of which—by intricate cross-checking only hinted at in the *Almagest*—must have been an accomplishment of no small difficulty. He developed procedures for computing the circumstances of lunar and solar eclipses in a straightforward way within an accuracy of a few minutes. He confirmed the existence of the precession, although because of his incorrect location of the equinox he also confirmed Hipparchus's low estimate of its rate. He catalogued the fixed stars (over a thousand of them) more thoroughly than ever before. But his finest achievement was in planetary theory; here, where Hipparchus had given up, Ptolemy succeeded. In so doing, he not only invented the first reasonably accurate planetary model, but also discovered a fundamental property of planetary motion (with profound consequences that were not developed or understood until the work of Kepler and Sir Isaac Newton). The closer one studies Ptolemy's work, the more remarkable, the more ingenious, it becomes.

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Orientalism and the Scandals of Scholarship

VICTOR BROMBERT

ORIENTALISM. *By Edward W. Said. Pantheon. $15.*

Some thirty years ago, Sartre proclaimed that the writer's function is to give society a bad conscience by reminding it that no act or knowledge can be innocent. Edward Said, in his latest book, has tried to live up to this injunction. Focusing on what he calls the "scandals of 'scholarship' " in the field defined as "Orientalism," he has set out to unmask the aggressiveness and quest for power that lurk behind the pretense of scholarly objectivity.

Orientalism means to Said not merely the erudite or imaginative interest in a region (more specifically the Levant), but the traditions and vested interests of a scholarly guild (Oriental studies) alleged to work hand in hand with colonialism and imperialism. To him Orientalism—whose development coincides with the period of greatest European expansion, from Napoleon to 1914—is a political doctrine, and Orientalist scholars, explicitly or implicitly guilty of racism and ethnocentrism, have been the architects of a vast enterprise of usurpation. They have thus constructed a harmful fiction. To make his point more tellingly, Said begins his exposure of the language of Orientalism by quoting, not—as one might expect—from some learned text, but from a speech by Balfour to the House of Commons and from an article about "subject races" by Lord Cromer. The strategy is logical. Said knows the importance of opening signals. The ones he sets up are meant to indicate the deep connivance, in the Western establishment, between scholars, politicians, and colonial administrators.

A "bookish" Orient that corresponds not to the reality it pretends to represent but to the structures of Western ideologies is a subject with a great potential. Edward Said correctly speaks of the essentially hermeneutical relation between Orientalist and Orient. Flaubert, whose *Dictionnaire des idées reçues* he evokes, would have read with a chuckle the catalogue of tautologies and clichés he so abundantly provides. Said has a talent for detecting and displaying the damning quotation. He brings to his acerbic enterprise considerable vigor, fervor, and skill. Provocative in tone and approach, tuned to many resonances, marshaling considerable materials, the book invites us to a fresh aproach.

Orientalism also raises some broad issues whose importance clearly transcends the Eastern Mediterranean basin. What is the point of articulation between knowledge and power? Can objectivity be attained, or is truth in language, as Nietzsche affirmed, nothing but a mobile arsenal of metaphors? Can there be true representation of anything—specifically of another culture? And in dealing with other cultures, do ethnic and racial differences matter as much as sociopolitical and economic divergences? How is one to measure the political impact of the Romantic imagination? What are the proper roles for the modern intellectual, and what are the modalities of betrayal? Above all, does methodological self-consciousness provide us with the means of liberating ourselves from ideological straitjackets? These are only

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some of the questions that come up in great profusion throughout the pages of this book.

Said's premise is that any body of knowledge and beliefs, made manifest in scholarly texts as well as in the web of popular culture, constitutes a discourse that can be analyzed in terms of style, figures of speech, recurrent themes, narrative devices. According to Said, the Orientalist discourse, as it has been spun and institutionalized, unmistakably betrays a will to cultural hegemony and repression. The grammar and the tropes of this collective discourse seemingly correspond to a system of ideas which speaks of immobilizing structures, authority, and the will to dominate and appropriate the Orient as "the other." Orientalist knowledge in general and Orientalist scholarship in particular are thus perceived as a form of rape. This rape is performed by textualizing reality—that is, by transmuting the living reality "into the stuff of texts," which robs the subject (the Orient) of its existential status.

Said hardly hides his indebtedness to Michel Foucault. In a series of studies centered on the *savoir-pouvoir* of repressive modern society, Foucault set out to lay bare the dialectics of information and control, so as to demonstrate that the collective discourse of our society (in which the dynasty of scholars supposedly plays a noxious role) necessarily implies the politics of coercion. When Said writes that Cromer's and Balfour's language depicts the Oriental as something one judges, studies, depicts, disciplines "as in a school or prison," or when he refers to Orientalism as knowledge of the Orient that places things Oriental "in class, court, prison, or manual for scrutiny, study, judgment, discipline, or governing"—one easily recognizes the favorite obsessive images of Foucault's own language, which, in order to make full sense, must be replaced in the context of French institutional life and ideological debates.

The central argument of Said's book is strongly set in place from the outset. The aim is to be at once selective and comprehensive. No claim is made to provide a systematic survey of the evolution and achievements of Orientalist scholarship, but Said's project is ambitiously all-embracing in another sense. He boldly ranges through the worlds of scholars (Silvestre de Sacy, Renan, Massignon, Gibb, and many others), literary travelers (Chateaubriand, Flaubert, Nerval), political agents and adventurers, modern news media. He draws our attention, with equal seriousness, to the relation between philology and European ethnocentricity, to a Flaubert letter describing public copulation in an exotic setting, to the white man's mission as celebrated by Kipling. This range and variety of levels may be highly suggestive. It certainly is provocative. The reader is made to realize that no cultural phenomenon can be isolated, that the images and myths a society projects are a collective product. But what society? Are there not several societies involved here—in different places and different times? Napoleon's era and its aftermath in France, the Victorian period in England, the historic moment when the United States acknowledged that it was a world power—can these be discussed in the same terms? (One of the difficulties with Said's method is that he himself is induced to do what he objects to in the Orientalist discourse, replacing the narrative thrust with an arresting synchronic tableau.) It might also be pointed out that in any complex society the various levels Said identifies could be at odds with each other; that poet, scholar, and politician could be talking different languages or (utilizing similar words) could mean altogether different things.

Although there are references to the pre-Napoleonic work of Anquetil-Duperron and William Jones, the book's narrative thrust begins under the sign of Napoleon's encounter with the Orient and the desire, in Said's felicitous phrase, to put Egypt into modern French. For Napoleon, while genuinely curious about the East, was keen on mobilizing Orientalist expertise for political and commercial purposes. Multiple interests thus presided over a cultural monument such as the *Description de l'Egypte*. Silvestre de Sacy, whose seminal scholarship was revered by generations of Orientalists, illustrates the more than occasional link between scholarly endeavors in the field of Oriental languages and public policy. From Henri Dehérain's 1938 biography of Sacy, one gathers that Talleyrand, who urged the creation of a chair of Persian language at the Collège de France, also communicated to Sacy his desire to see him work for the Ministry of Foreign Af-

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fairs. It is therefore hardly surprising that in 1806 Sacy translated into Arabic the *Bulletins de la grande armée* and the *Manifeste,* whereby the emperor hoped to arouse local religious fervor against Russian orthodoxy. There may also be substantial truth in Said's suggestion that the methodology of Silvestre de Sacy and of other contemporary scholars (taste for compilations, tableaux, catalogues, anthologies) parallels the organizational apparatus of political control—though such parallels are hard to pinpoint and may easily lead to the broadest kinds of generalizations.

The narrative then proceeds to Renan, whose philological concerns and attribution of organic norms to Indo-European languages are discussed in the perspective of an implicit racism, whose extolling of the power of modern science is viewed as the corollary of a contempt for the Semitic races. It then moves to the influence of Edward William Lane's *Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians,* and on to Richard Burton's *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to El-Medinah and Meccah,* by way of the Orientalist motifs of four French Romantics (Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Nerval, Flaubert), all four more or less imbued with the idea of the civilizing and redemptive mission of France. These reverie- and sensation-seeking literary tourists did much to project the Orient as a land of myth, lethal sex, deep mysteries, half-forgotten memories—above all as the privileged locus of timelessness. As for more recent developments in Orientalist studies and Orientalist lore, Said deplores the repetitiveness of assumptions and themes; the methodological and ideological backwardness of the praxis; the shift, especially on the American scene, from philology to social science; and the increasing collusion between the Middle East Studies establishment, business, foundations, and the world of the universities. In the process he comes down particularly hard on *The Cambridge History of Islam,* exasperated by its "unrelieved chronology of battles, reigns, and deaths, rises and heydays, comings and passings, written for the most part in a ghastly monotone."

What emerges from this survey is a critical, though necessarily redundant, inventory of clichés. Orientalism, Said argues, has put into circulation as valid currency some of the smuggest and most contemptuous beliefs: that the Arab mind, mired in an atomistic view of things, is incapable of accuracy and logic; that the Arab world knows no tradition of freedom, has no concept of peace, and is given to fanaticism; that the typical Oriental is sensuous and lustful, but his sexuality, being essentially of a passive nature, cannot be taken seriously; that the "timeless wisdom" of the Orient goes hand in hand with exhaustion—and that, of course, the European identity is superior. Said gleans these tiresome clichés from a variety of sources, and it does not seem to matter whether they are derived from scholarly works, medieval superstition (even Dante is put to contribution), travel accounts, guidebooks, journalistic cartoons and movies, political and economic fears, popular prejudice, or just plain ignorance.

Said brings considerable conviction to this enterprise. The pages on de Lesseps, Silvestre de Sacy, and Renan are lively. His stylistic observations are shrewd, often ingenious. His attacks on the rhetoric of "high cultural humanism" are pungent. The comments on Lane's manipulation of the narrative voice by means of "colossal tidbits" are those of an imaginative literary critic. The stylistic observations on the metaphors of depth, secrecy, and sexual promise surrounding the central notion of the "inscrutable Orient" are to the point, even far-reaching. Much of the Romantic, post-Romantic, and so-called "decadent" literature could be studied with these metaphors in mind. And all along, stimulating questions come up: how myth can displace life, how essentialism undercuts the revolutionary potential, how the narrative process comes into conflict with the synchronicity of paradigms.

These are interesting intellectual issues. But Said does not confine his argument to intellectual speculation; his book is largely denunciatory. Reverence is not his forte. He has set out to communicate his indignation or, at the very least, a thorough malaise. One may wonder, however, whether the malaise we experience is brought about exclusively by his theme or whether it is not also related to his own method. Without belaboring the amplifications and exaggerations (the "paper-thin intellectual apparatus" of Orientalism); or the

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tendency to caricature (some of the most respected scholars are seen, by insinuation, as political propagandists and Cold Warriors); or the curious omissions (why, for instance, does he not explore the "Oriental" mode of eighteenth-century writers bent on criticizing Europe?); or the propensity to detect denigrating sexual images in the prose of Orientalists—one might well question some of Said's approaches to his subject. Does he not tend to set up discredited models? It is hard to believe that serious scholars would see Islam as a cultural synthesis that could be studied "apart from the economics, sociology, and politics of the Islamic peoples." And what about some of the facile juxtapositions (Lamartine and Zionists are coupled incongruously and anachronistically in the same sentence) and the shifts of levels? Aeschylus and Dante (Said makes much of Mahomet's ugly punishment in the *Inferno*) present cultural and intellectual problems somewhat different from Count Volney or Silvestre de Sacy. The work of Gibb and von Grunebaum should, one might think, be discussed in a somewhat different perspective from the exotic costume of a class reunion, peevish student comments in a course critique, film clichés of camel-driving natives or gas pump terrorists, and cartoons of hook-nosed venal leaders. Such sylleptic thinking, verifiable in metaphoric terms, brings about questionable analogies. Thus, apropos of the "discipline of accumulation" (of facts!), ". . . it made Orientalism fatally tend towards the systematic accumulation of human beings and territories." Not merely is the metonymic shift a clever trope; the description is transmuted into an indictment. The gatherer of knowledge appears fated to become the aggressor.

This indictment of Orientalism raises still more fundamental questions, many of which Said leaves unanswered. Granted that a relation between knowledge and power exists, does it follow that the will to knowledge is synonymous with the will to power? Power, or the use thereof, is, moreover, not the same as the use of force. To put the question differently, is the desire to know the Other necessarily a way of killing him? It may well be that Europe has articulated the Orient. But how can one know the Other without thinking him? Thought, by definition, articulates the Other. And if Orientalist thinking must be viewed in sexual terms, one could easily argue that all thought has traditionally been described erotically; we speak of penetrating and embracing (the French do of *fouiller* and *étreindre*) a subject. But if the analogy between knowledge and sex has any merit, must one conclude that all sex is rape? What is so shameful about the power of the mind? There are those who choose to see in it the only possible greatness of man.

Edward Said censures von Grunebaum for his "pseudoscientific prejudices," quoting his peremptory affirmation that Muslim civilization "is not vitally interested in the structured study of other cultures." Readers who do not possess the qualifications of either von Grunebaum or Said to discuss the cultural identity of modern Islam may, however, find it a little more difficult to dismiss Grunebaum's contention after reading Said's own observation that "there is no major journal of Arab studies published in the Arab world today," and no Arab organization for studying the United States. If that is so, then surely economic reasons ("direct and crude economic pressure from the United States") cannot alone explain such an absence.

The arguments advanced by Said are not without their paradoxical side. If ideologies are not merely mirrored by texts, but spun by them, how is this to be reconciled with a *Bouvard and Pécuchet* type of copying? It would seem that a predetermined discourse such as the one Said describes must lead to the antithesis of knowledge as power: the powerlessness of the intellect. Should we not, rather, assume that there is a greater play in a given discourse, and that intentionality can be oriented and changed by the discourse itself?

At times Said's thinking takes on a distinctly utopian cast. Early in the book he muses on the general dangers of dividing human reality "into clearly different cultures, histories, traditions, societies, even races . . ." and wonders if one can "humanly" survive the consequences of such differentiations. But what are the alternatives, and would not the consequences of a refusal to differentiate lead to reductionism and loss of specificity? It is interesting that Said, so annoyed by the fixating images imposed on the Orient, himself

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indulges in defining and confining what he revealingly calls the "Orientalist bent of mind."

All this is arguable and worthy of serious discussion. Much less engaging are the polemical excesses which only weaken the arguments and the general tone of the book. One of these has to do with Bernard Lewis's etymological discussion of the Arabic word for revolution: *thawra.* Said complains that Lewis relates the word to the classical Arabic term for rising up (as does a camel), and then proceeds to denounce Lewis for being sarcastic, for hinting that Arabs are not psychologically equipped for serious revolutionary action; that they can at best be stirred, excited—but their excitement "is no more noble than a camel's rising up"; that they are scarcely more than neurotic sexual beings. The charge is that Lewis, like all traditional Orientalists, hates his subject.

Somehow this was not my recollection of Lewis's *The Arabs in History*, and on rereading the chapter entitled "Islamic Civilization," I was, on the contrary, struck by the author's sympathetic comments. He speaks warmly of a poetic language and tradition of "remarkable richness," of extraordinary and original achievements in mathematics, physics, and chemistry; he stresses the complexity and diversity of his subject; he praises the medieval Muslim's relative tolerance when contrasted with his Western contemporaries. These are not exactly sarcastic comments. As for the offensive camel image in the essay "Islamic Concepts of Revolution," it hardly seems to justify Said's irate contention that Lewis implies that "instead of copulation the Arab can only achieve foreplay, masturbation, coitus interruptus." This is a travesty of textual explication. And it is after this performance that Said speaks of the "scandals of 'scholarship' "!

There is something tempting about such stylistic analyses. If Said were to apply his interpretive skills to his own prose, he might discover that he tends to attribute thoughts and intentions to the scholars he discusses by means of highly charged figures of speech. At one point, for instance, he evokes the Dacier report commissioned by Napoleon and referred to as the *Tableau historique de l'érudition française*, to which Silvestre de Sacy contributed. The new historical consciousness is described by Said as "dramatic"; learning can be "arranged on a stage set." Are the theatrical images to imply theatricality, illusionism, make-believe? Said next compares Dacier's entire discourse to the arcades and counters of a modern department store. What are these images of a modern European bazaar meant to convey if not a further cheapening of scholarship by metaphorical association with the heteroclite, bric-a-brac atmosphere of a profit-making enterprise? Still further, Said refers to the didactic notion of the scholarly tableau as a kind of "Benthamite Panopticon." The implication here will not escape readers of Foucault: Bentham's Panopticon was designed for the more rational surveillance of prisoners. (The implication here is that knowledge becomes a trap, a form of control.) And sure enough, the image of the Panopticon is immediately followed by the expressions "scholarly discipline," "technology of power," "specialized power and acquisition"—though such acquisition is also perceived as a form of production but of a peculiar type. We are reminded that Silvestre de Sacy "made the books" of his field, and that in order to "go about making them" he "ransacked" the Oriental archives. Why use the verb "ransack" instead of "examine," "study," "scrutinize," or a dozen other possibilities unless to connote plundering and pillaging? Ultimately, so we are informed, Silvestre de Sacy "doctored" the ransacked materials. Are we to understand that he compounded theft with the scholar's cardinal sin of tampering with the documents?

Perhaps it is hard to conceive of an exciting critical book without a polemical stance—and one often yearns for more passionate involvement. But when polemical fervor so notably colors a discourse, there is some cause for concern. There is always sadness in any apparent loss of faith in humanism. By this I mean loss of faith in the possibility that some minds, even if caught (as we all are) in the snares of life and institutions, nonetheless value the joys of disinterested scholarship and love their field of study more than the society that sustains them, more even than their own intellectual comfort. Sartre may have been right in stressing the intellectual's obligation to give society a bad conscience and to remind us that we are

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never innocent. But surely Camus was not wrong when he denounced that passion for denunciation which would not rest until condemnation became indiscriminate.

Freud French-fried

THE FANTASTIC ART OF VIENNA. *By Alessandra Comini. Knopf. $20.*

SIGMUND FREUD: HIS LIFE IN PICTURES AND WORDS. *Edited by Ernst Freud, et al. Translated by Christine Trollope. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. $39.95.*

PSYCHOANALYTIC POLITICS: FREUD'S FRENCH REVOLUTION. *By Sherry Turkle. Basic Books. $12.50.*

Reviewed by JAMES SLOAN ALLEN

Freud "is no more a person now," wrote W. H. Auden, "but a whole climate of opinion." Yet Freud would be the first to doubt that all who invoke his name share a common understanding of his ideas. For Freud knew that every patient, every curious intellect, every national culture would encounter those ideas differently, under the sway of different defenses against psychological truth. These diverse encounters have given rise to contrasting interpretations of Freud as well. One, shared by many historians and post-Freudian theorists, views Freud's ideas as creations of turn-of-the-century Vienna and deems them unsuited to late twentieth-century life. Another, espoused by more orthodox Freudians, holds Freud's theories to be true irrespective of their cultural origins or therapeutic efficacy.

The three books under review play across this division in sketching the cultural history of pscyhoanalysis from Freud's Vienna through his lifetime and the dissemination of his ideas to the conquest of the country most resistant to Freud from the beginning: France.

Like Alessandra Comini's previous studies of the modernist painters Gustav Klimt and Egon Schiele, *The Fantastic Art of Vienna* probes the bizarre and self-conscious art that manifested the troubled Viennese psyche before World War I. But here Comini looks behind modernism into the tradition upon which the modernists drew and which continued after them. "Long before the Viennese dreamt the dreams" interpreted by Freud, she begins, Vienna was known as the "City of Dreams." And these dreams, even when touched by laughter, betrayed fears of death and an anguished existential uncertainty born of Vienna's vulnerable place at the crossroads of armies and as the fragile seat of a more fragile empire. From the origins of the Hapsburg Empire in the fifteenth century to today—as Comini shows in a few dozen illustrations and a slender, thoughtful narrative—Viennese art has dwelt upon escapist fantasies and grotesque imaginings of nature and the self.

Although similar, if less impressive, catalogues might be assembled from other cities, such as Prague or Brussels, Comini's Vienna, like that described by historians Carl Schorske and William M. Johnston, was the ideal birthplace for psychoanalysis. In Freud's day the City of Dreams was the decaying heart of Central Europe, its waning Biedermeier propriety enfolded in an overripe aestheticism and a rising fascination with eros and psychic aberration. It was the capital city of anxiety, repression, wishes, and pathology, where appearance and reality danced wildly together but never married.

How appropriate that here Freud discovered that psychic disturbances arise not from real but imagined traumas, and that neurotic symptoms are fantastic substitute gratifications of denied desires. And how natural that here, in the dance of fantasy and life, even medicine fell under the spell of aestheticism, giving rise to the doctor of artistic aspirations and tastes, the *Künstlerarzt*. Comini unfortunately overlooks this phenomenon, which so nicely bridges the imagination of pathology in art and life.

Freud may be numbered among those *Künstlerärzte*, for although he derided the modernist painters as trivially exhibitionistic, he assiduously collected primitive art, with which he cluttered his office and consulting room. He also wrote a fine, quietly elegant prose (for which he was awarded the Goethe Prize), sprinkled with literary allusions. And, like many fellow Viennese adherents of "therapeutic nihilism," he confessed a greater in-

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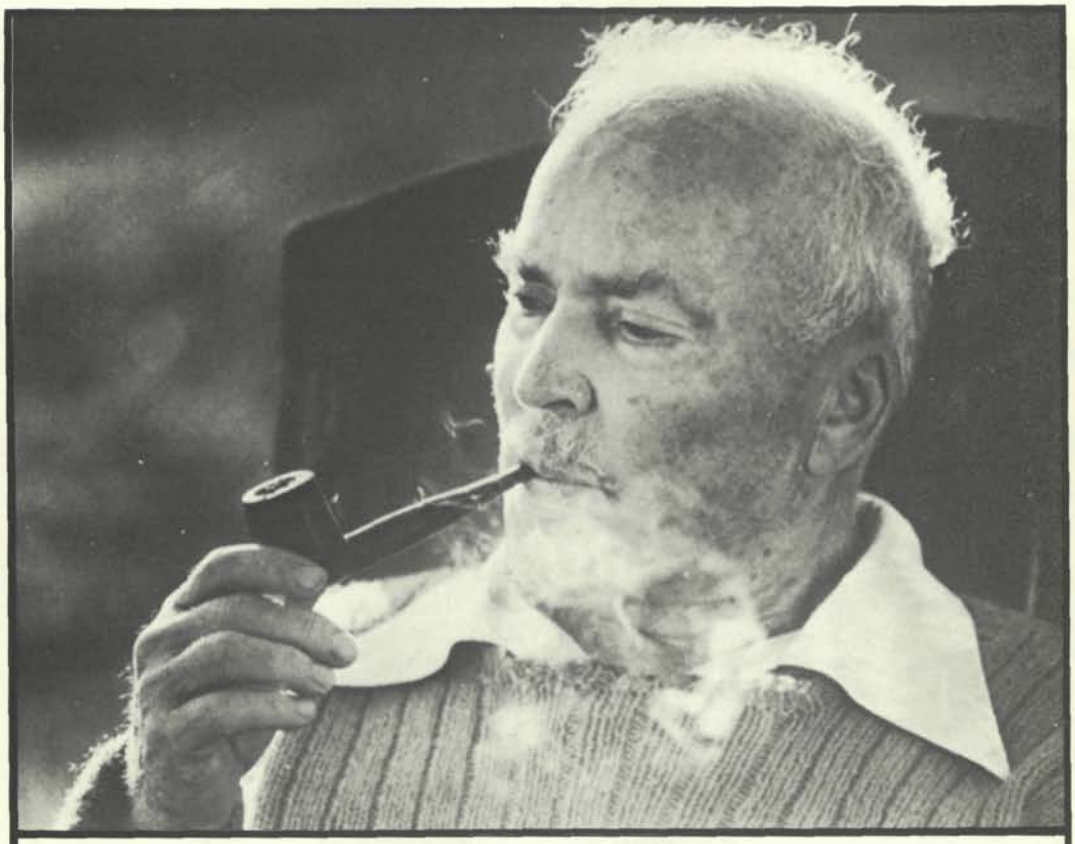

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RICHARD EBERHART

Foreword by James Dickey

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terest in the mysteries of the psyche than in the cure of disease. "I have become a therapist against my will," he wrote to Wilhelm Fliess (quoted by Ernst Freud), because, he said elsewhere, "the chief aim of psychoanalysis" is not to cure but "to contribute to the science of psychology and to the world of literature and life in general."

Yet Freud denounced as "quite exceptionally stupid" the idea that psychoanalysis was simply a Viennese creation. He believed that, whatever its origins, psychoanalysis was a theory of human nature threatening to the very sinews of culture, and that the stronger a culture the stronger its resistance to the threat. "Precisely for this reason," he said, "the centers of ancient culture, where the greatest resistance has been displayed, must be the scene of the final decisive battle for psychoanalysis."

Ernst Freud's painstaking collection of pictures and excerpts, mainly autobiographical, from his father's works and letters traces Freud's efforts to lead his ideas toward that final battle. Although this handsomely produced book, with an able but uninspired introduction by K. R. Eissler, lacks the pointed interest of, say, Edmund Engelman's photos of Freud's home and offices accompanied by Peter Gay's stimulating essay (*Berggasse 19*, 1976), it has uses as a documentary biography.

It shows, for example, how Freud, from childhood on, viewed himself as an embattled outsider—which, as a Jew, he was—who relished intellectual conflict. Resenting his father's timid response to anti-Semitic harassments, he took as his earliest hero the Semitic conquerer Hannibal, who, he said, "symbolized the tenacity of Jewry." Later he told his fiancée, in one of his many love letters to her, that for him life meant "risking a lot, hoping a lot, working a lot. To average bourgeois common sense I have been lost long ago"—although not lost, as his letters and surroundings make evident, to the comforts and contentments of bourgeois life. And at the dawn of his fame, he called himself, in a moving phrase oddly missing from this collection, "not an experimenter, not a thinker . . . but a conquistador . . . an adventurer."

Many of Freud's words here reflect the hopes and difficulties of institutionalizing psychoanalysis. Freud promotes and protects his ideas like a proud father, establishing orthodoxy, creating the International Psycho-Analytical Association, warmly embracing devoted followers and sternly rebuking or even ostracizing revisionists for "replacing psychoanalysis." The history of the psychoanalytic movement, as Freud knew, is thus an intellectual, social, and psychological history, holding many clues to culture and ideology in the twentieth century.

That history has yet to be written, although installments have appeared in recent years, with mixed success, by Paul Roazen, Nathan G. Hale, Jr., and Hannah S. Decker. Now Sherry Turkle, a sociologist, examines the belated career of psychoanalysis in France.

The differing responses to psychoanalysis in America and France have become a commonplace of intellectual history. The Americans, who lacked, as Freud said, "any deep-rooted scientific tradition" or "stringent rule of official authority," easily adopted the parlance of psychoanalytic conflict and liberation—so easily, in fact, that Freud doubted the Americans had understood him; and, as he might have predicted, they soon fashioned from his ideas a most un-Freudian therapeutic ideology and a Horatio Alger myth of the freely developing ego. By contrast, France showed itself, as Freud noted, "the least disposed to welcome psychoanalysis" of any place. Here might be "the scene of the final decisive battle."

Turkle, a faithful Parsonian theorist, finds the cause of French resistance in values. The French, she says, including novelists, psychiatrists, social theorists, and common folk, shared a faith in rationality, consciousness, and the "stability and security" of the "family, nation, religion, community and regionality," which rendered them "not ready for psychoanalysis." As a portrait of the politics of the Third Republic—the "stalemate society" of Turkle's mentor, Stanley Hoffmann—this is a fair likeness. But as psycho/cultural history it is nonsense. One would think France a placid place, unvisited by any of the harsh winds of modernism, which had actually been lashing against the bulwarks of established values in France since Baudelaire. In the very year after Freud and Breuer published the proto-psychoanalytic *Studies in Hysteria* (1895), for example, Alfred Jarry sent "Ubu Roi" onto the French stage crying

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"Merdre!" (heard for the first time on any stage) at a shocked audience and acting out the rapacious desires of unbounded instinct. And soon after Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), André Gide's *The Immoralist* appeared, a tale of primitive energies and unconstrained will directed explicitly against the repressive bonds of accepted culture and morality. Nor was an intuition into the troubled relations between instinct (the unconscious) and culture confined to literature. The pioneering sociologist Emile Durkheim, whom Turkle inexcusably neglects to mention, detected and deplored a spreading contempt for moral constraints throughout modern society, at the same time that Freud was exploring tensions between instinct and morality. As Talcott Parsons argued long ago (something Turkle overlooks), "The convergence of the fundamental insights of Freud and Durkheim" was a "massive phenomenon," yielding the discovery of that unconscious source of social pressure and self-punishment, the superego.

In ignoring such intellectual convergences, Turkle distorts the cultural history of psychoanalysis in France and elsewhere. Psychoanalysis failed to take hold in France, not because French culture was blind to the bitter conflicts between psyche and society, but because, after recognizing those conflicts, French intellectuals turned away from them, under the influence of World War I, to enter an anxious and insular course through language, consciousness, and culture toward various forms of philosophical and aesthetic self-discovery. This course—"the obstructed path," as the historian H. Stuart Hughes once called it—has been marked by an ever more rapid succession of cultural fashions and celebrities (surrealism, existentialism, structuralism, and the poststructuralist amalgam derived from Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud), which have turned Paris into the intellectual show business capital of the West. But this journey has hardly terminated in the decline of French cultural insularity or an adequate understanding of Freud.

Who could be surprised that the Frenchman who finally advocated a "return to Freud," Jacques Lacan, came to psychoanalysis from surrealism, having discovered the true Freud in the early interpreter of words and dreams, rather than in the later metapsychologist of civilization and its inevitable discontents? But would Freud—even as *Künstlerarzt*—admire Lacan's poetic psychoanalysis, which openly defies the rational exercise of language and mind? And who can deny that Lacan's radical ideas and imperious manner—his repudiation of institutional authority, conventional analytic methods, and therapeutic success—have affinities with Freud's hostility to the medical profession? But, as the father not only of psychoanalytic theory but of its institutionalization, Freud would recoil at Lacan's anarchic individualism. And, finally, who can doubt that Lacan's radical individualism and devotion to psychoanalysis as a revolutionary form of self-knowledge have suited the mood of French intellectuals since 1968? But this does not mean, as Turkle believes, that France has at last become a truly "psychoanalytic culture"; rather it suggests that France has merely gallicized Freud to fit needs and fashions of the moment.

Still, Turkle is convinced that the events of 1968 constituted a Lacanian "revolution of speech and desire," which shattered the anti-Freudian bias of the French and opened their culture to revolutionary and psychoanalytic forms of knowledge and life. And she holds the French experience as something of a model for Americans, whose psychoanalytic establishment has long been a captive of the conservative medical profession (as Lacan has been saying for years) and whose culture has turned away from radical political action since the sixties. Yet Lacan's psychoanalytic theories are so typically French—wrapped as they are in the elusive metaphors and metaphysics of the French language, taking as their motto "the unconscious is structured like a language," and distrustful of prosaic empirical verification—that they must remain for the most part strangers to Americans as well as to the Viennese Freud. What is more, the psychoanalytic culture modeled on Lacan is less politically radical than Turkle wants it to be. Unlike American radical thinkers, such as Herbert Marcuse and Christopher Lasch, who take the late Freud as their guide (another fact Turkle ignores) and spurn individualistic fantasies, the French radicals, including the "anti-psychiatrists" Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, have made a fetish of individual desires. "I take my de-

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sires for realities, because I believe in the reality of my desires," reads the May 1968 slogan Turkle quotes approvingly as a "projection of Lacanian theory into the social field." But this revolutionary attitude is less an antidote to the quiescent narcissism of the seventies than a symptom of it. And Turkle's further observation that the mass public in France associates psychoanalysis, not with psychological difficulty and bold truths, but with easy self-help, clinches the case against her thesis: psychoanalysis in France is not so much a revolutionary Freudian doctrine as a new rationale for prevailing Gallic modes of "discourse," for antisocial self-knowledge, and for the adaptation of conservative people to the world around them.

Psychoanalysis may at last have conquered France, but Freud would not recognize here a triumph of his ideas. For no less than the Americans—and perhaps no less inevitably—have the French found a Freud to their liking. With that happy discovery, which sanctions the liberation of desire and theorizing by metaphor alone, they have further masked their continued resistance to the sharply observing, theoretically exacting, and pessimistic Freud of early twentieth-century Vienna.

Conflation and Its Discontents

ROBERT LOWELL: LIFE AND ART. *By Steven Gould Axelrod. Princeton University Press. $14.50.*

Reviewed by PAUL BRESLIN

It has been two years since Robert Lowell died in September 1977, but in the last ten years of his life his reputation had declined perceptibly. Yes, he did win the Pulitzer Prize for *The Dolphin* in 1973, but the various incarnations of *Notebook* provoked a good deal of irritation among his erstwhile admirers. When he died, everyone took respectful notice, yet there was no longer a consensus, as there had been in the mid-1960s,

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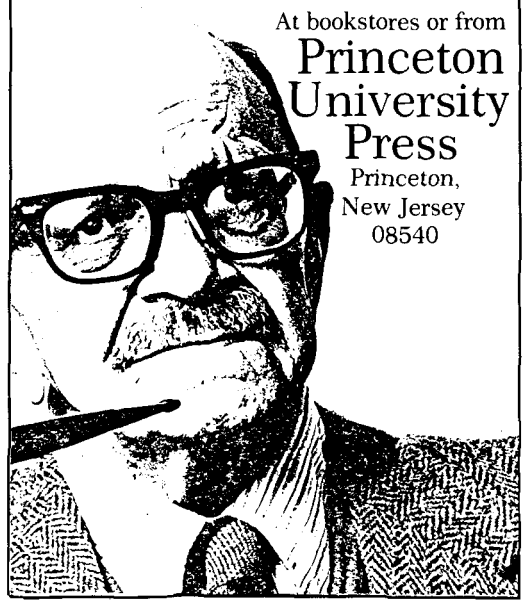

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that he was our best and most representative poet. We may have to wait a few years for a book that will sort out the good poems from the bad, make sense of the poet's career as a whole, and judge the degree and nature of his achievement as compared with that of his contemporaries. Steven Gould Axelrod's *Robert Lowell: Life and Art* is not that book; it is, rather, an unwitting example of the critical vocabulary we must abandon before that book can be written.

Having said this, one must acknowledge that Axelrod has done some valuable research. Although most of the biographical information he provides is already obtainable from various sources, his book gives us the most complete single account of Lowell's life available. He has also studied the manuscript drafts of several important poems, including "Skunk Hour," "For the Union Dead," and "Waking Early Sunday Morning," as well as Randall Jarrell's notations on the manuscript of *Lord Weary's Castle*. Until a full-scale biography and a more detailed study of the manuscripts come along, Axelrod's book will remain useful, at least to those who know how to take what is useful and leave the rest alone.

Helen Vendler gave Axelrod a justifiably stern critique in the *New York Review of Books*. But in questioning the value of any attempt to evaluate art by its fidelity to life, she condemns the book, in my view, on the wrong grounds. To say that Lowell's poetry, from *Life Studies* onward, differs from the early work only in being "better written" is perversely pure formalism. Indeed, if we were to judge entirely by formal coherence and prosodic craftsmanship, we should have to find Howard Nemerov, Elizabeth Bishop, Anthony Hecht, and perhaps a dozen other poets clearly superior to Lowell. When we say that one poem is "better written" than another, part of what we mean is that it corresponds, more scrupulously and more subtly, to something we must call life or experience. Lowell himself thought so. He said, in his *Paris Review* interview of 1961, that with *Life Studies* he had abandoned an "Alexandrian" style in order to attempt a "breakthrough back into life." He said that he had loosened his meter because he "couldn't get [his] experience into tight metrical forms." He praised Hart Crane for the "fullness of experience" in his poetry and noted approvingly that Delmore Schwartz "felt the poet who had experience was very much better than the poet with polish." If Lowell's development really had nothing to do with fidelity to "experience," then the poet himself was sadly deceived. So I am inclined to grant the legitimacy of "Art and Life" as the main theme in a study of Robert Lowell—or any other poet. It's just that what Axelrod says on this matter will not do. We repeatedly hear that art, for Lowell, is a function of life, but Axelrod's attempts to describe that function don't get very far.

Axelrod's style, clear but soft contoured, full of received ideas stated in received language, reveals how threadbare many fashionable ideas about the relation between art and life really are. Uncamouflaged by any rhetorical brilliance, these ideas stand forth in all their poverty. One winces, or ought to wince, upon reading that Lowell, after his apprentice work in *Land of Unlikeness*, "plunged into the multiplicity and miscellaneousness of experience, opening himself to his experience as certain flowers open to the daylight." The poems of Lowell's second book, *Lord Weary's Castle*, instead of "demonstrating an already thought-out intellectual position [God forbid!] . . . make themselves vulnerable to the world, to the poet's wide range of intellectual, emotional, and imaginative responses to his world." The rest of his career, with some minor backsliding now and then, is a story of ever-increasing "openness" to "experience."

The experience to which Lowell opens derives from two main sources: the poet's inner or personal life and a more or less public, external realm, which is likely to be part of the reader's life as well. As Axelrod puts it, " 'Experience' . . . means the sum of relations and interactions between psyche and environment. It grows from the Cartesian dualism of inner and outer, but through its interpenetrating energies abolishes the dualism. Just as experience mediates between self and world, partaking of both, so Lowell's poems mediate between himself and his world, and between his personal history and that of his readers." The best poems, for Axelrod, are those in which the public and private merge, either because Lowell has found "a way of universalizing his own inner oppositions," or

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because, by "conflating his individual past with the national past, he treats each as a metaphor for the other."

The idea that Lowell's poetry unites public and private experience runs through most discussions of his work. Although other critics have given us more sensitive and articulate responses to the poetry, none of them really go much further than Axelrod toward explaining how and why Lowell effects this union. (Patrick Cosgrave's *The Public Poetry of Robert Lowell* and Alan Williamson's *Pity the Monsters* are partial exceptions, but Cosgrave's dogmatic insistence that public poetry requires a universally accepted moral code prejudices his account, while Williamson's assumptions are sometimes so close to Lowell's own that he lacks critical distance.) To run public and private experience together may or may not make for good poetry, depending on how it is done and for what reason.

When Lowell "conflates" personal and public experience, we may assume he wishes to show that both arise from the same moral causes. After all, modern social thinking has been preoccupied with the question of how people internalize their cultural heritage; we have all heard the argument that the individual is a product of heredity and environment. If so, then any individual is representative, in large part, of the culture in which he lives. Therefore, if a poet wants to find a public theme, he need only look more closely at the way his own psyche has been constituted and he will find that society has left its imprint there.

So far, so good, but there are problems. In order to recognize the cultural origins of his own character traits, the poet must be able to distance himself from them to some extent. He must be able to say, "This trait is not merely private to me; it comes from influences that affect others as well." The moment one says this, one has begun to separate public and private. If, as Axelrod would have us believe, "experience . . . abolishes the Cartesian dualism of inner and outer," how can this moral recognition take place? To put it another way, we have absorbed the tacit assumptions of our own culture so deeply that it requires considerable intelligence and effort even to recognize them as assumptions. The conflating of one's inner life with the external world, far from being the triumphant achievement of Lowell's best poetry, is instead the moral problem from which that poetry begins. Unless we can distinguish between ourselves and the cultural forces tugging at us, we can will only the vector sum of those forces.

One could argue that Lowell's best poems, therefore, are those in which he succeeds in disentangling public and private, while continuing to acknowledge their mutual relations. In "For the Union Dead," for instance, he begins with a childhood reminiscence of the aquarium, of his fascination with the "dark downward and vegetating kingdom / of the fish and reptile," but by the end of the poem the symbolism of fish and reptile has become public material; we really aren't, as we are in *Life Studies*, especially concerned with the details of the poet's private life. The memory serves as a point of contact with a unifying symbol that derives its meaning with little or no reference to autobiography. (I have oversimplified, but only slightly.) And those harrowing poems of private suffering in Part IV of *Life Studies*—need we go on insisting that they describe *our* predicament in order to be moved by them? "For the Union Dead" is a public poem, and "Man and Wife" is a private poem. Both are wonderful, but one can't explain why by muttering some piety about the conflation of public and private experience.

In some of Lowell's poetry the connection between public and private seems less a matter of common origins than of mere analogy—using each, as Axelrod would say, "as a metaphor for the other." In "Che Guevara," for instance, Lowell mourns the death of the revolutionary leader and then concludes:

> the poor Latins much too new for our new world,
> Manhattan where our clasped, illicit hands
> pulse, stop my bloodstream as if I'd hit rock. . . .
> Rest for the outlaw . . . kings once hid in trees
> with prices on their heads, and watched for game.

Apparently we are to think of the poet, in his "illicit" handclasp with some extramarital beloved, as analogous to the hunted "outlaw," Che Guevara; otherwise the lines about the poet and the woman do not belong in the poem at all. Here, it seems to me, public and private have indeed been conflated, to the

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detriment of the poem. The comparison is self-aggrandizing and pointless.

Well, not quite pointless. There is a psycho-political line of argument that would ground the comparison in some objective relation between the poet's situation and Che Guevara's. One could say that the poet, in having an affair, has rebelled against the repressions of bourgeois marriage and thus committed a political act. His guilt is the internal counterpart of the repressive order that "gangstered down" Che Guevara. I have tried to state this interpretation without irony; if it sounds pompous and silly, I can't help it. But it represents a kind of thinking that was very popular when "Che Guevara" was written, a kind of thinking that clearly influenced Lowell's later poetry. Anyone who wants to do a good job on Lowell's conception of the relations between public and private experience will have to think about the psycho-political theories of the counter-culture during the late 1960s. To what extent did Lowell, who participated in the anti-war movement and wrote about that participation, accept the ideas of social reality current within the movement? How adequate were these ideas, and what were their consequences for his poetry? Axelrod does not address these questions.

If Axelrod's grasp of recent intellectual history is tenuous, his hold on literary tradition is not much firmer. Early in his account, he places Lowell in the poetic line of Emerson. He quotes Emerson's assertion that the poet should "tell us how it was with him," adding that "such a poetry, though based on the individual life, ultimately proves not solipsistic but on the contrary 'representative,' for it democratically assumes that humanity's perceptions are common." But Lowell did not assume "that humanity's perceptions are common." If he had, why would he have taken so much trouble to reconstruct the contingent details of his own life for the reader? Lowell, on the contrary, stressed the degree to which each life is unique and irretrievable, unless art rescues it from oblivion by bearing witness. Emerson distinguishes between the everyday self with its entanglements and an idealized self, the "One Man" who is "present to all particular men only partially, or through one faculty . . ." ("The American Scholar"). It is this universal higher self, not a particular self that grew up at 91 Revere Street, that Emerson has in mind. If Emerson asks the poet to "tell us how it was with him," he also enjoins him to "leave the world, and know the muse only. Thou shalt not know any longer the times, customs, graces, politics, or opinions of men, but shall take all from the muse." And, he warns, "thou shalt not be able to rehearse the names of thy friends in thy verse, for an old shame before the holy ideal." None of this sounds like a description of Robert Lowell.

Axelrod's discussions of particular works vary in quality. Aside from the cant about conflation of public and private, his section on the title poem of *For the Union Dead* is fairly good; one can learn from it and from the section on *Lord Weary's Castle.* The treatments of *Life Studies* and *Near the Ocean* are less satisfactory, and the sketchy accounts of the problematical later volumes (*Notebook: 1967–68* and after) are the least satisfying of all, perhaps because these experimental books force the reader to think about general questions of poetics.

Although Axelrod does better with practical criticism than with inquiry into principles, even here he rarely goes beyond routine competence, and sometimes he falls short of that. Consider, for example, his discussion of "Skunk Hour." The skunks may be businesslike in obtaining their meal, and they may look eerie in the moonlight, but no one who sees the image Lowell is presenting could compare an animal smaller than a cat, walking with its even smaller offspring down a broad, deserted street, to "a bestial, morally repugnant occupation army." Nor do the skunks "anticipate Ted Hughes's 'Crow.' " A comparison of *Crow* with *Life Studies* would be useful mainly to show the difference between Hughes's melodramatic nihilism and the more complex, critically intelligent pessimism of Lowell.

Axelrod repeatedly mistakes Lowell's grim but resilient mood for Hughesian Grand Guignol. Sometimes one suspects that a keener ear for the echoes of other poetry would have helped him place Lowell's tone. For example, in the commentary on "Myopia: a Night," we are told that with the line, "The things of the eye are done," Lowell "declares himself ready for suicide." But it cannot be pure accident that Lowell's words

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translate, loosely but recognizably, a famous line from Rilke's "*Wendung*": "*Werk des Gesichts ist getan.*" In Rilke's poem, completing the "work of the sight" prepares the poet to do "heart-work" on the images the eye has gathered; he has reached a momentous "turning" in his career. Lowell alludes to Rilke ironically, for his own poem ends with nothing more momentous than dull assurance that it is morning, that he has made it through a bad night. To miss the allusion is to miss the self-deflating irony also.

Enough said. Scholars working on Lowell will want to consult this book for its biographical information and discussion of manuscript drafts. The general reader can do better elsewhere: the short essays by Randall Jarrell and Irvin Ehrenpreis, the books by Hugh Staples, Alan Williamson, and—for the chapter on Lowell's syntax—Marjorie Perloff. The book we would all like to have, clarifying Lowell's relationship to the literary and social history of his time, sorting out the strengths and limitations of his work, remains to be written. Whoever writes it will need to clarify, and sometimes to question, the assumptions about poetics, psychology, and politics implicit in the poetry. Lowell's poetry has enduring value, but it is also very uneven, permeated with confusions and unresolved conflicts that cannot be explained away by New Critical incantations about the rich complexity of experience. We do Lowell's work no honor if, instead of trying to understand and evaluate it, we cover it over with vague praise.

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Reviewed by PETER MEDAWAR

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branch of science having to do with cancer; the prefix "onco-," as in "oncogen"—an agent causing cancer—has the same special reference.) The avowed purpose of Dr. Israël's book is to close the gap "between the way in which cancer patients are treated today and the way in which they could be treated."

This ambition leads to a certain ambiguity about the nature of the audience to which the book is addressed. Certainly it should appeal to a wide audience: to laymen who want to read something unmistakably authoritative but written without condescension and not too far above their heads. Cancer workers, whether clinical or experimental, will benefit too—as everyone does from any synoptic examination of a complex subject that is the work of a single perceptive and well-informed mind.

Israël declares that he is not thinking mainly of France when he says that "many patients are still treated the way they were ten or more years ago." But when he adds, "A great many doctors are ignorant of the progress or deny it or even oppose it," he is referring to an attitude—one of partisanship "with passion"—that is certainly more prevalent in France than in the United States, where practitioners are, if anything, a little too ready to adopt new medicaments and schemes of treatment.

The author's intention, he tells us, is "to present all the information on cancer that is readily available but that, so far as I know, has not yet been gathered between covers, either for practicing physicians or for the interested public." Yet: "The reader must not imagine that this book contains unpublished secrets or personal remedies. On the contrary, part of my purpose is to expose charlatans of every type, men who profit from despair and hold back progress by dissuading countless victims of cancer from seeking real help."

After defining these tasks the author goes on to explain how admirably well qualified he is to carry them out.

Turning now to the "prime causes of cancer and its innermost mechanisms," Israël takes "vigorous exception" to the view of the "many distinguished thinkers who believe that our accomplishments as practicing physicians—as engineers, so to speak—will remain illusory until the molecular biologists have brought those causes and mechanisms to light." He writes:

> If, today, one little leukemia sufferer out of three has a good chance of being cured, whereas fifteen years ago his or her life expectancy never exceeded three months, the credit goes not to the achievements of molecular biology but to the obstinate, patient efforts of the therapists, among whom members of the French school, headed by Jean Bernard and Georges Mathé, have played a decisive role. The therapists have had to combine the most advanced techniques with a judicious empiricism. They have had to invent a whole methodology of clinical trials and experimental chemotherapy, to develop the fields of cell kinetics and radiobiology, and to perfect many technologies, such as that of sterile environments, for example. It is interesting to note that the oncologists—cancer specialists—have contributed much more to general immunology than the specialists in basic immunology have so far contributed to oncology.

There is a truculent air about this quotation which I believe to be unjustified. Oncologists and basic scientists are not competing with each other. Mathé, for example, learned the basic drills of cellular engineering from cellular immunologists—a debt he has more than paid back by his own scientific contributions to immunology.

As for molecular biology, it is of course a truism to say that the efficacy of a medicament does not depend upon our understanding of how it works; penicillin worked for very many years before anybody discovered how it did so. In the long term, progress will certainly depend upon scientific understanding; Francis Bacon would have been shocked by the idea that anybody should think otherwise. Chemotherapists rely greatly upon antiproliferative agents—substances that impede cell division. But while it is true that empiricism and opportunism gave us X-ray therapy, and may conceivably one day usher in an era of neutron beam therapy, the dosimetry of X rays and the procedures which will one day, we hope, lessen the disadvantages of neutron beam therapy can come only from the basic sciences. The same applies to those antiproliferative agents such as the antifolics and the nucleic acid base analogues which depend for their efficacy upon the chemical mimicry of natural bodily constituents, and to those other antiproliferative agents such as the alkylating agents which

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seem to react directly upon cellular DNA.

I am sorry to report that there is a resentful air about some of Israël's judgments: "Today, within the medical establishment, skepticism is still considered in good taste, while enthusiasm and innovation are severely frowned upon." To make his point, Israël says that the first cases brought forward to demonstrate that streptomycin could cure tubercular meningitis and that penicillin eliminated syphilis in a matter of days were dismissed as hoaxes. "As for syphilis, it was not a disease to be treated but a sin to be expiated by twenty years of injections of bismuth, arsenic, and mercury. It was shocking to think that it could be cured in a week. When the young doctors in hospitals, relying on the work of American clinicians and on their own clinical and biological observations, offered proof of that fact, they were greeted with insults and disbelief."

This judgment is very unfair. The progress of modern medicine depends greatly on the astringently critical evaluation of the claims made for new therapies. Let Israël only reflect upon the disgraceful activities of the Welsh cancer curers with their pots of caustics—happily exposed by the British Medical Association. Were we not critical, the pharmacopoeias of the world would be cluttered up with phony remedies for multiple sclerosis, cancer, and myasthenia gravis. The trouble is that new medications are ushered into the world with the connivance of a kindly conspiracy, one in which the physician wants to cure his patients as much as his patients want to be cured, a pharmaceutical company wants to put it within the physician's power to cure his patients, and the lay public—future victims, perhaps—are at all times willing co-conspirators.

Those who think that we are sometimes unduly skeptical about new medicaments should recall that throughout the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth, "medicines" were widely believed to be efficacious for many human ailments, though in reality they were not. Specific medical treatment did not begin until Gerhard Domagk discovered the antibacterial properties of Prontosil—the discovery out of which developed the sulfonamide drugs. When I was a student at Oxford, it was regarded as a comic degree of naiveté to suppose that any medical treatment ever did anybody any good—a skeptical attitude derived directly from the teaching of one of the greatest physicians of the twentieth century: Sir William Osler of Montreal, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and the University of Oxford.

Surgery was a different matter, of course. Fifty years before the sulfonamides came in, surgeons were busy with all manner of good works. As a matter of social history, the success of surgical treatment at a time when medicine was virtually impotent is probably the main explanation for the lofty and superior attitudes with which some present-day physicians treat surgeons, whom they like to dismiss as skillful manual technicians.

Yet in spite of his therapeutic ineffectiveness "the doctor" has remained a revered figure in real life, in literature, and in opera. The operas *La Traviata* and *La Bohème* end most tragically as their respective heroines lie in the last extremities of disseminated tuberculosis. Though much affected by the music, I keep my composure on these occasions by reflecting with delighted amusement upon the remedies proposed or hoped for by other members of the cast: "Send for the doctor" or, worse still, "Send out for some medicine."

Israël began his professional life as a lung specialist under the guidance and encouragement of a great expert on tuberculosis, Etienne Bernard. A good training, this; as Dr. Lewis Thomas has pointed out in one of his characteristically wise and illuminating essays, tuberculosis was at one time held in the same kind of awed dread as cancer is today—as a disease of cruelly arbitrary incidence, almost impossible to cure, and altogether impossible to cure if it gained a foothold and spread throughout the body. Popular opinion holds cancer in much the same dread today. Israël soon realized that if he were to become an oncologist, he would have to educate himself in chemotherapy, immunology, cell kinetics, and even radiobiology and statistics. "The diversity in the background of oncologists is partly responsible for the controversies that rage in this field, the rivalries and struggles for control of the specialty." These words will sound strange to American ears. In America a phrase such as "the control of the specialty" will have little meaning.

There are not enough oncologists, Israël believes; hence the nature of the treatment a

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sufferer receives will almost certainly depend on whether the doctor has been trained as a surgeon, radiotherapist, or medical oncologist. At the same time, innovations introduced by genuine oncologists are all too often obstructed by the ignorance or prejudice of the doctors to whom cancer patients first turn.

Intent now upon demystifying cancer therapy, Israël turns first to surgery and radiotherapy. He regretfully notes that the general public has formed the opinion that the radical treatment of cancer, whether by surgery or radiotherapy or a combination of the two, gives one or two patients out of three a survival period of five years. This makes the public believe that medical treatment (for example, the administration of anticancer drugs) is a merely ancillary process and that the way to increase the percentage of cures is through early detection of cancer—an earlier application, therefore, of radical treatment. This is quite mistaken, Israël believes, for metastasis—the covert spread of the tumor—brings it about that "mortality from cancer persists beyond ten years, and sometimes beyond fifteen years." A patient who has passed the five-year mark, although he may be pleased with himself, must not be easy in his mind and think he need not undertake longer range treatment. There is, in any event, no certain way of saying whether or not an individual patient is cured, i.e. has passed beyond the stage at which a further relapse may occur. Israël specially chides those who withhold medical treatment on the grounds that it might impair "the quality of life" of patients who may, after all, be cured. There is a double misconception here. Radical treatments are "infinitely" less offensive than they used to be and at the same time more effective: "it is not so much the patient's quality of life that is impaired as the doctor's intellectual comfort." Israël's experience "proves" that when "the patient who has undergone an operation knows what is at stake he always accepts the possible disadvantages of further treatment."

Another of the inadequacies of surgery is that many cases are discovered too late to benefit from surgical treatment; and this is, in any case, feasible only for cancers of external organs and virtually useless for cancer of the deep organs.

Israël is contemptuous of the philosophy that advocates a patient's being allowed to "die in peace." He says that chemotherapeutic procedures and other strategies very often hold a tumor at bay in spite of metastases, maintaining a kind of equilibrium state in which discomfort and inconvenience to the patient are no greater than what would be suffered by a kidney transplant patient. Israël cites a number of case histories—some of them very moving—as evidence for his beliefs.

So far in his book Israël gives the impression of being a passionate physician who may make too much of obstacles put in the way of innovators. I suspect, though, that his own sanguine temperament is not an inconsiderable element in his therapeutic success; for the role of the psyche in resistance to cancer is coming to be as widely acknowledged in the field of oncology as it has been for many years in that of tuberculosis—resistance to which is thought to rest upon mechanisms cognate with those thought to defend us against cancer.

The remainder of Israël's chapters are more technical. To begin with, he points out that although many causes of cancer are known—viruses, hydrocarbon tars and other chemicals, and so on—the final common pathway which leads to the transformation of a normal into a malignant cell is still not known. Very true, but today it is most important not to depreciate the importance of what we do know about the various causes of cancer. The world's leading cancer epidemiologist, Sir Richard Doll, puts the percentage of tumors that are of extrinsic origin—i.e. are the result of the action of agents external to the cells upon which they act—as high as 80 percent. To identify and eliminate these causes (tobacco smoke and other pollutants) is therefore the most important contribution to solving the cancer problem at present within our grasp.

Israël cannot resist having a dig at the laboratory scientist who, in his search for the ultimate mechanisms of the disease, is "trying to find the miracle pill we are all praying for"; while the physician, "fighting in the front lines, as it were, and taking advantage of the smallest shreds of partial knowledge, tries to relieve suffering, to prolong life, to help nature—and is sometimes able to cure." I do

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not know who that abstract entity "the basic scientist" is, but I think I may not be one because I do not hold any of the ambitions Israël imputes to me as a basic scientist. I do not believe in, and certainly would not seek, any single "cure for cancer" but I believe that each form of cancer will eventually be managed or controlled by methods appropriate to itself—methods which can only be arrived at by laboratory research, abetted wherever possible by epidemiology. Lung cancer has already been diminished by the abstention of educated people from smoking, and I think there is good epidemiological evidence, backed up by lab research, that the frequency of breast cancer could be greatly diminished if early childbearing were the rule instead of the exception, or—as my colleagues and I believe—if it were possible to devise an immunological simulation of pregnancy which would give young women the kind of immunological protection that evidently results from early pregnancy. Hormone-dependent cancers, to which Israël devotes a special chapter, can also be brought under control.

Like most of my fellow workers I still have, in spite of many disappointments, a faith in the existence of a natural defensive mechanism against cancer which is, in a wide sense, immunological in character. I am indeed much more confident of the ultimate success of physicians, surgeons, and biologists working together than Israël sometimes gives the impression of being.

Positive Logicalist

SELECTED WRITINGS IN BRITISH INTELLECTUAL HISTORY. *By Leslie Stephen. Edited and with an introduction by Noel Annan. University of Chicago Press. $17.*

Reviewed by WILLIAM HALEY

For over a century and a half the Stephen family had a potent influence in the evolution of English ideas and society. From the departure of James Stephen, the antislavery cru-

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sader, from London for the West Indies in 1783 to the suicide of his great-granddaughter, Virginia Woolf, during the Second World War, the Stephen genes produced thinkers, judges, lawyers, administrators, writers, and at least one distinguished artist. Their influence began with the Clapham Sect and continued to the Bloomsbury Group. It spanned the reign of the third King George to that of the sixth.

When, thanks to the skill and enthusiasm of Professor Merle M. Bevington of Duke University, *The Memoirs of James Stephen* was published twenty-five years ago, it showed the progenitor of these descendants to have been a remarkable man. The fact that he never took his autobiography beyond his twenty-sixth year, although he lived long enough to do so, does not weaken its effect. The *Memoirs* were the work of the mature man. It is not fanciful to see in some parts of them foreshadowings of his famous grandson, Leslie.

What the young people of today think of Sir Leslie Stephen—if they think of him at all—I do not know. Historians, journalists, politicians, even historical novelists will long owe him a debt of gratitude for the *Dictionary of National Biography,* which he created and fashioned for that titan of Victorian publishers, George Smith. Leslie Stephen edited it for close on ten years, and made the astonishing contribution of nearly four hundred articles. George Macaulay Trevelyan described the *DNB* as "the best record of a nation's past that any civilization has produced." What man of letters could ask for a better memorial? Yet it was a small part of Stephen's lifework.

His eminence (and reliability) in the Victorian literary world is further proved by the fact that when Macmillan's commissioned John Morley to produce the English Men of Letters series, he decided that the first volume should be on Dr. Johnson, written by Leslie Stephen. In spite of all his other work in hand, Stephen delivered the manuscript within six months of accepting the task. The book is among the most readable of Stephen's works, and one of the best in the series. He also wrote the volumes *Hobbes, Pope, Swift,* and *George Eliot.* (The last was rather a disappointment; *Middlemarch* exposed his limitations.)

It is a loss, even though reasons can be found, that Stephen's other bookish works are now so little read. The three series of *Hours in a Library,* the four volumes of *Studies of a Biographer,* and similar writings now attract little attention. Victorian surveys often ignore him. The most appreciative, and at the same time judicial, estimate of Stephen as a literary critic that I have read in the past ten years is John Gross's summing up of him in *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters.* Lord Annan's memorable work, *Leslie Stephen: His Thought and Character in Relation to His Time* (1951), had a far wider purpose.

Lord Annan returns to that purpose in *Selected Writings in British Intellectual History,* drawn from Stephen's works. He has culled *A History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century, English Literature and Society in the Eighteenth Century, An Agnostic's Apology,* and *Hours in a Library.* He has taken nothing from Stephen's last book, *Hobbes,* presumably because it is expositive rather than critical. If that was Stephen's purpose, it is one of the most effective of his volumes.

When one considers the range and copiousness of Stephen's works, this may seem to be getting him into a tight corset. But Lord Annan's book is one of a University of Chicago Press series, Classics of British Historical Literature, and he keeps within the prescribed confines. He justifies the essays on Johnson and Wordsworth as showing Stephen "at his best in moral analysis." In these essays, he says, "one can see how scrupulous Stephen was in weighing what he must have found unsatisfactory as philosophy yet enchanting as morality." Welcoming their inclusion, I must make a confession: I am no philosopher. Like Dr. Johnson's friend Oliver Edwards, I have tried, but have always found cheerfulness breaking in. At the same time, I was shaken recently while listening to Bryan Magee's discussion with Professor Alfred Ayer of Oxford, in the BBC's series of talks by modern philosophers. I found that, paralleling the experience of Molière's Monsieur Jourdain with prose, I had been a logical positivist for forty years without knowing it. Morality is a more rewarding field of contemplation, even after the philosophers have done their worst with it.

Lord Annan begins his extracts from *English Literature and Society in the Eighteenth*

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Century toward the end of the sixth paragraph, first chapter. In starting there he is true to his terms of reference. I regret, however, the loss of what is, for the general reader, one of the most interesting of Stephen's speculations: how much influence is to be attributed to the individual, to Carlyle's "heroes"?

> Our scientific teachers are inclined to reply that no single person had much importance, and that an ideal history could omit all names of individuals. If, for example, Napoleon had been killed at the siege of Toulon, the only difference would have been that the dictator would have been called, say, Moreau. Possibly, but I cannot see that we can argue in the same way in literature. I see no reason to suppose that if Shakespeare had died prematurely, anybody else would have written *Hamlet*. . . . It makes one tremble, says an ingenious critic, to reflect that Shakespeare and Cervantes were both liable to measles at the same time. As we know they escaped, we need not make ourselves unhappy about the might-have-been; but the remark suggests how much the literary glory of any period depends on one or two great names.

This passage came to mind only a day or two ago when I heard someone declaring that every notable scientific advance would still have been made had its original discoverer not existed, but that mankind would have been left without the Ninth Symphony through all eternity had there been no Beethoven.

Revelation comes in flashes. This is particularly true where the printed word is concerned. In *George Eliot* Stephen's affectionate rearward glance at the novelists of mid-Victorian days, "a flowering time of genius," and his confession that he could fall in love with Maggie Tulliver, have offset for me much of the coldness if not aridity that has been attached to his name. Part of the reason for this reputation is his commonly accepted masterpiece: *A History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century.* Lord Annan devotes a third of his volume to extracts from it. It establishes, he says, Stephen's reputation as a scholar and a thinker.

It is perhaps necessary to sketch the path that led to the ideas Stephen eventually held. He was born in 1832. His father was one of the most powerful civil servants of his day. Young Leslie seemed set for a university career; he even became a clergyman in order to stay on as a fellow at Cambridge. He was an outstanding tutor. He "did more, perhaps," says Lord Annan, "than any other single don during the century to change the notion of this moral training."

When he was thirty he realized that he had never had any faith. He relinquished, without any of the agony and fuss of Clough, his fellowship, and later his orders. For the remaining forty years of his life he was probably the busiest and most prolific serious writer in England. He established himself as a leading agnostic, more persuasive than John Morley and without Morley's asperities. Indeed, to quote Lord Annan again, "Whether he was writing biography, criticizing a thinker, or judging a novelist, Stephen was always doing so as a moralist"—one, moreover, "to whom virtue and vice were so unambiguous that there was scarcely any need to ask his reader to identify them."

This is what makes these writings of his still worth reading. In the four chapters from *English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* chosen for this volume he is at his best with "Analogy [Joseph] Butler." "His essential doctrine is the independent system of morality. . . . The God whom Butler worships is, in fact, the human conscience deified." About Hume, Stephen was not so certain. What was Hume's real belief? Did Hume's theoretical skepticism follow him into actual life? Stephen thought that this was "a question for a biographer rather than for the historian of thought," but the essay holds the reader nonetheless. Bishop Warburton is another matter. Stephen had a weakness for him, writing twenty columns on his life in the *Dictionary of National Biography.* Today not even Dr. Johnson's admiration for him and his appearances in Boswell can make Warburton anything but a bore.

One comes with eagerness to Lord Annan's final choice for inclusion: *An Agnostic's Apology,* written in 1876. In it Stephen sought to come to settled terms with his quasi preceptor, John Stuart Mill. Those who have read *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity,* the tremendous onslaught on Mill by Stephen's elder brother Fitzjames, may find Stephen's treatment of his theme hesitant. Wrongheaded as Fitzjames is, his vehemence is stimulating. His closing paragraph is one of the

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noblest utterances of the nineteenth century; it holds true today. But the quiet contemplation of *An Agnostic's Apology* should not deceive us. Much of it has equal relevance.

It may be temerarious for a reviewer to step outside his immediate brief, and to plead for a consideration of his subject-author in another guise. Sir Leslie Stephen's appeal as a creator of some of the Classics of British Historical Literature is bound to be limited—though Lord Annan in his introduction declares Stephen to have been "the second most important man of letters in the late Victorian age" (the first being Matthew Arnold). Lord Annan's inclusion of "Thoughts on Criticism, by a Critic" should be an incentive to some readers to seek out some of Stephen's volumes outside the field of ideas. This attractive essay shows Stephen in a warmer and more human light than posterity has so far seen him. Admittedly, he lacks the gusto Saintsbury made fashionable. That is a valuable quality, particularly in attracting new readers to great literature. But it is not everything. Nor is Quiller-Couch's conversational charm. Stephen has his own wares to offer. If John Gross is right, and the man himself was more impressive than his ideas, this is an added claim for him to be given a new lease on life as a man of letters as well as a historian of thought. A start could be made with a companion volume of his literary essays.

Paid Consultant

THE DELPHIC ORACLE: ITS RESPONSES AND OPERATIONS (WITH A CATALOGUE OF RESPONSES). *By Joseph Fontenrose. University of California Press. $22.95.*

Reviewed by BERNARD KNOX

In spite of the gigantic buses parked end to end just below the Castalian spring, the schoolmarm voices of guides retailing potted information in all the languages of Europe (not to mention Japanese), the almost solid masses of camera-hung, foot-weary humanity in slow movement along the immense conveyor belt of the Greek tourist machine—in spite of all this, Delphi can still work its awesome magic. The visitor feels its spell as he looks up to the reddish rocks which tower over Apollo's temple and, higher still, to the outworks of Parnassus, or downward to the sheen of the olive trees that fill the Pleistus River gorge hundreds of feet below. In antiquity, though it lived off visitors as it does today, this was a holy place, the religious center of the Greek world. Of all the many shrines at which Apollo gave advice and prophecy—Didyma, Claros, and many another—this was the most famous, the most eagerly consulted. Apollo's priestess, the Pythia, seated on a tripod in the inner recesses of his temple and deep in an ecstatic trance, answered the questions put to the god. His priests interpreted her mouthings to produce—usually in hexameter verse and often in obscure, riddling terms which hedged the divine bets—oracular prophecies which were the wonder of the world. Apollo foretold the future to individuals and to states, whose policies he thus determined; he gave instruction in the sphere of constitutional reform as readily as in that of religious cult and, in the seventh and sixth centuries B.C., it was he who, through his oracle at Delphi, guided the Greek colonial expansion which dotted the coasts of the Mediterranean and Black seas with cities—from Marseilles in the West to Olbia, between the mouths of the Bug and Dnieper, in the East.

So, at any rate, the ancient Greeks and Romans believed; and so, outside specialist circles, does the modern world. Professor Fontenrose does not. In fact the only two items in the preceding paragraph which he would be willing to accept are, first, that the Pythia sat on a tripod and, second, that she delivered instructions (which were not only in prose but also extremely prosaic) on matters of religious cult. His book is a thoroughgoing demythification of Apollo's oracle at Delphi.

On the details of the consultation procedure we have little evidence, but Fontenrose is on firm ground when he dismisses what Yeats called "the Delphian Sybil's trance." Ancient accounts of intoxicating vapors rising from the earth have long since been discredited by geological surveys; and although it was once thought that the Pythia raised her consciousness by eating Apollo's laurel, Professor T. K. Oesterreich, as E. R. Dodds puts

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it in his great book *The Greeks and the Irrational,* "once chewed a large quantity of laurel leaves in the interests of science and was disappointed to find himself no more inspired than usual." Few will question the conclusion Fontenrose draws from his careful review of the evidence—that "the Pythia was not seized with a frenzy; she spoke coherently."

Fontenrose's main concern, however, is with what the Pythia said. The task he sets himself is "to find out just what sort of a response was verifiably spoken at Delphi." This calls for "a careful examination of the whole corpus of extant Delphic responses." Such a corpus has already been assembled in the second volume of Parke and Wormell's *The Delphic Oracle,* in which the Greek (and occasionally Latin) texts of 615 Delphic oracles are printed. Fontenrose excludes 95 of these and adds 15 from other sources. The 535 items in his *Catalogue of Responses* are paraphrased or summarized in English, set in their context (Consultant, Occasion, etcetera), keyed to their ancient sources, and critically assessed. Unlike Parke and Wormell, who arranged the responses in historical order (historical order, that is, of primary sources; the oracle given to Laius, for example, turns up in the Fourth Period, 419 to 431 B.C., since it occurs in Sophocles), Fontenrose arranges the responses in four categories: Historical (75), Quasi-Historical (267), Legendary (176), and Fictional (16). The main argument of his book is that the largest class, the Quasi-Historical, is in fact not historical at all but, in one sense or another, legendary.

Fictional are those oracles obviously invented by a comic poet for a joke or a late novelist for his plot. Legendary oracles are those which, like the famous oracle given to Laius, have no historical context and, even by mythical chronology, antedate the foundation of the Delphic oracle by many centuries. Historical responses are defined as those with an "accepted probable date" which "fell within the life time of the writer who attests it . . . or not long before the date of the inscription which records it." And Quasi-Historical are those responses "allegedly spoken within historical times" but "first attested by a writer whose life time was later than the accepted or supposed date of the response."

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Fontenrose's analysis of the characteristics of these categories produces devastating results. "Historical responses are commonplace pronouncements, mostly clear commands and sanctions on religious matters, occasionally on public or private affairs"—unlike the Legendary responses, which of course contain "extraordinary predictions, warnings and commands, often ambiguously expressed." But "when the Quasi-Historical responses are analyzed in the same manner many of them turn out to have the characteristics of legendary responses"; they "conform in theme and expression to the oracles and prophecies of folktale and legend"; they "are integral constituents of narratives which . . . have a legendary character"; some of them turn out to be "riddles and proverbs given an oracular origin in tradition." The obvious conclusion is that most of the Quasi-Historical oracles are in fact legendary; they come from the collections of oracles belonging to professional prophets and were attributed to Delphi by their authors or by later writers.

This is hard doctrine. The results "demand a rejection as non-genuine of almost all responses said to have been spoken in the first three centuries of the Delphic oracle, roughly 750–450." The oracles directing the colonists to Syracuse, to Cyrene, Croton, and Sybaris; the famous ambiguous reply to Croesus, as well as the equally famous reply to the Athenians, that safety lay in their wooden wall—all these are to be rejected. For most of these prophecies our authority is Herodotus; "the issue in effect," says Fontenrose, "reduces itself to the trustworthiness of the Delphic oracles Herodotus reports." Fontenrose's verdict on this point is wholly negative. In earlier times, as "from the fifth century onwards," the oracles' responses must have consisted of "commonplace sanctions of sacred laws . . . cult foundations, proposed festivals . . . prescriptions of sacrifices or offerings," and "residues of safe statements about the past, present and future in answer to specific questions."

This is a powerful indictment and comes from the pen of an authority on the subject who has already published two books and a host of articles and reviews on the origins and history of the Delphic oracle. Space forbids more than this highly compressed and partial summary of his long, meticulous argument, and also counter-arguments on points of detail. But some general critical remarks suggest themselves.

The whole argument obviously depends on the definition of the category "Historical." Fontenrose's formula limits it to 75 responses; over half of these are extant, in whole or in part, on inscribed stones; the rest come from writers contemporary with the response. The inscribed responses are indeed extremely prosaic. They concern, for example, the sacrifice of an ox to Apollo and the construction of altars to Ares and Athena, and they all date from after 450 B.C. But they may not be a safe criterion. They show, indeed, that Delphic responses could be commonplace, prosaic instructions, but they do not exclude the contrary. True, state expenditures of various kinds were normally (especially at Athens) exposed for public scrutiny in this way, but there would have been no reason why the Pythia's reply about the wooden wall, for example, should be so recorded on stone, and even less reason for an inscription recording the Delphic reply to Croesus. The second category—responses recorded by a contemporary writer—is very limited: most of the writers who quote Delphic responses were, naturally, historians, and historians generally deal with the past. The obvious exception is Thucydides, who wrote the history of his own time. But it is remarkable that of the five Delphic responses he refers to, not one is "commonplace." One advised the Epidamnians to hand over their city to Corinth, thus precipitating a war. Another advised the Spartans to make war on Athens, and promised victory and Apollo's help, invited or not. Another advised the Athenians to restore the people of Delos to their homes, from which they had been removed. Another approved the Spartan proposal to found a colony in Trachinia. Yet another, in highly poetical language even in Thucydides' paraphrase, urged the Spartans to bring back their exiled king—"otherwise they will plow with a silver plowshare." (In this case the Pythia, so the Spartans claimed, had been bribed by the king, but that does not affect the form and manner of the response.) These five responses, reported by a proclaimed skeptic on the subject of oracles, give us a picture of a Delphic oracle advising on colonial settlement, intervening decisively in Greek politics, using poetic (and obscure)

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language which suggests verse as the original form, and, in two cases, weighting its advice with what amounts to prophecy. This is a far cry from Fontenrose's vision of its "commonplace" activity.

His criterion of trustworthiness is neither as relevant nor as exclusive as he claims; on this basis the oracles in Herodotus cannot be so easily dismissed. Some of them few would now defend as authentic in exactly the form Herodotus reports (certain instructions to colonists, for example, seem all too prescient), but the Delphic oracles of the Persian War period are another matter. Herodotus cannot have been more than a child at the time of their supposed delivery, but there were Athenians alive when he gave readings from his book who could remember Salamis and the epic struggle against the Persian invasion. The two famous oracles given to the Athenians before the sea battle are dismissed by Fontenrose as "doubtful." But the grounds of this judgment are themselves a little doubtful; one example will suffice. The first oracle (the advice to "fly to the ends of the earth") was not, in Herodotus' account, an answer to a question but a spontaneous response, and "only among Legendary and non-genuine Quasi-Historical oracles do we find spontaneous responses." It so happens that we have an inscription recording just such a response; it uses a very unusual verb, *automatizo*, to specify that Apollo spontaneously instructed Battos and the people of Thera to found the colony of Cyrene. What is more, this passage occurs in a fourth-century inscription which claims to reproduce the text of a seventh-century agreement. The latest editors (Meiggs and Lewis, in *A Selection of Greek Inscriptions to the End of the Fifth Century B.C.*), though they "assume a long and complex moulding of a genuine original within the tradition of Thera," still "think it not unsafe to assume that we have before us genuine elements of what was said and done in seventh century Thera." A more serious objection to Fontenrose's dismissal is that this particular oracle shows Delphi in a very bad light—convinced that Persia is irresistible and counseling panic flight or surrender. The Delphian priesthood would have no conceivable motive to invent or preserve such a text; moreover, the fact that Herodotus, an author solidly biased in Delphi's favor, believed this

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oracle was genuine speaks volumes for its authenticity.

But there is one larger question raised by the results of Fontenrose's assessment which he does not satisfactorily answer. If the oracle at Delphi gave nothing but commonplace answers of the type contained in his "Historical" section, how was it that this particular oracle of Apollo surpassed and almost eclipsed the others? Why did foreign kings make such rich donations? Why did so many Greek states—Athens, Corinth, Sicyon, Thebes, and others—build their own separate "treasuries" on the site, to house the trophies and dedications made in their name? Fontenrose explains that extraneous verse prophecies began to be attributed to the oracle "as Delphi's fame increased, and especially after Delphi had surpassed other oracles in prestige." But, on his showing, it is very hard to see how this could ever have done so.

The Delphic Oracle is a book which demands and stimulates controversial argument; it is no less admirable for that. It will lead the fascinated reader through many a legendary and historical maze, and he will learn much by the way. Whether or not he is convinced by the learned and acute discussions, he will be well advised not to quote any Delphic oracle as "historical" without first consulting Fontenrose's *Catalogue*, the evidence assembled there and the discussion of it in the main text.

Blessed in Deprivation

THE HABIT OF BEING. *By Flannery O'Connor. Letters edited by, and with an introduction by, Sally Fitzgerald. Farrar, Straus, Giroux. $15.*

Reviewed by MILES ORVELL

"There won't be any biographies of me because, for only one reason, lives spent between the house and the chicken yard do not make exciting copy." Flannery O'Connor's remark to a friend in a 1958 letter may or may not turn out to be true, but in the meantime we have something better than the single view of any biographer: a collection of O'Connor letters that adds up to a complex self-portrait, a volume that should markedly enrich our understanding of a writer whose reputation has continued to grow since her death in 1964.

Readers of Flannery O'Connor—her *Wise Blood* and *The Violent Bear It Away*, shorter masterpieces like "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," "The Artificial Nigger," "The Displaced Person," "Everything That Rises Must Converge," "Revelation"—will recall an angular fiction that welds together equal parts of comedy, violence, and Christian orthodoxy. These letters unfold a three-dimensional perspective for the eccentric tales, allowing us to overhear her arguing subtle theological points, bantering with literary friends, graciously (and sometimes ungraciously) responding to inquiries about her work, entertaining friends with anecdotes about the farm, and salting the whole with an ingratiating, self-deprecating humor.

Flannery O'Connor spent the major years of her creative life, from 1950 to her death fourteen years later, living with her mother on a dairy farm in Milledgeville, Georgia. There she raised birds of various feathers—most notably peafowl—and there she suffered the effects of lupus erythematosus, which cut short her early years of work outside the South and which finally ended her life at the age of thirty-nine. Though she recoiled violently, in her early twenties, from the forced rustication ("I was roped and tied and resigned the way it is necessary to be resigned to death"), she quickly found the rural South a source of strength, providing the sure sense of place that makes her comedies of manners surpassingly accurate, and providing as well an insulation from worldly currents that would firm the vision at the core of her work.

But we would be much mistaken to assume that Flannery O'Connor led a life which was either provincial or reclusive. The letters reveal clearly how wide was the range of her experience—the many friends (and strangers) who would visit the farm, her eager (and feared) forays into the world to lecture or read, and a correspondence that encompassed

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clergy, academics, writers. What the letters reveal, too, is the breadth of her reading—not only the Catholic novelists and intellectuals who were of such early importance (Mauriac, Greene, Maritain), but a congregation that embraced Freud, Mailer, Malamud, Nabokov, Buber, and even Henry Miller (the travel books). And when she was not reading, she was watching W. C. Fields, stock-car racing, and interviews with glum-faced atheletes on TV.

She wrote late in her life that "all my visitors go away with their own views [about her work] confirmed," and this must be as much the product of the visitors' wayward perceptions as of her own admitted reticence. Certainly it is the result of the stories themselves, which are at once pellucid and puzzling. Many of the letters, not surprisingly, are efforts to "explain" herself, most notably those addressed to one close friend identified only as "A." To "A" Flannery admitted her own identification with the driven and unlettered prophets (failed and true) who people her fiction, and also her identification with the proud intellectuals who must suffer a fall—like Hulga in "Good Country People." Of the violent and revelatory endings that mark so many of the stories, she had less to say: "I don't know why the bull and Mrs. May have to die [in "Greenleaf"], or why Mr. Fortune and Mary Fortune [in "A View of the Woods"]: I just feel in my bones that that is the way it has to be."

Much to pause over here: the inevitable rightness of her violent endings, their shocking revelatory power, their puzzling but undeniable logic. And the phrase itself—"feel in my bones"—which is at once a colloquialism and, on another level, an allusion to her own disease. It is hard to avoid speculating on the intersecting lines of life and work that run throughout these self-disclosures, and on the central axis of defiance and acceptance that seems to shape so much of her sensibility. At issue here is not simply coming to terms with the violence of her illness, but a whole stance toward the world that marked Flannery O'Connor's disposition from her earliest years apparently (when she would wear shocking T-shirts with bulldogs on them), and running to her wish that a friend's new baby girl will

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"have a fierce Old Testament name and cut off a lot of heads."

Tied up with this aggressive posture toward the world and its conventions—a posture that would choose satire as one mode of distance and judgment—was a lifelong defense of orthodox Catholicism. Clearly, renunciation was a kind of triumph, in her life and in her art, as the excited syntax of a remark to "A" suggests in a letter of 1956. Flannery refers her friend to a piece on Saint Thomas and Freud that is the answer "to what you call my struggle to submit, which is not struggle to submit but a struggle to accept and with passion. I mean, possibly, with joy. Picture me with my ground teeth stalking joy—fully armed too as it's a highly dangerous quest."

Her commitment to Catholicism was rigorous and intense, but it did not infringe upon her highly individualized (one might almost say Protestant) sense of her self, or on her intellectual and artistic independence. In a sense she was self-created, or, to use her own phrase about herself on one occasion, an Imaginary Orphan. And if she developed, during her increasingly acclaimed career, a conviction of her achievement, it was never without a sense of the cost as well, as in this rumination that compares her father's sporadic and unsatisfied ambition to be a writer with her own fulfillment: "[My father] needed the people I guess and got them. Or rather wanted them and got them. I wanted them and didn't. We are all rather blessed in our deprivations if we let ourselves be."

Running at a slight angle to the axis of defiance-acceptance is an axis of dependence-independence, and readers of Flannery O'Connor will be familiar with the many polar conflicts—between daughter and mother, son and mother, grandchild and grandparent—that she translated into fiction. One need not be an analyst to suspect the centrality in Flannery's life of her own relationship with her mother, Regina. Although none of her letters to her mother are included in this volume, Regina is present throughout—appearing mainly as "my parent," a figure of shrewdness and strength, given to peremptory comic utterance. One can easily see in Flannery's attitude toward her mother a not unnatural ambivalence-love, admiration, some resentment—but always with a sure sense of self-understanding, as in this gem of familial distinction: "I always thought that if [my mother] had a dog she'd name him Spot—without irony. If I had a dog, I'd name him Spot, with irony." Yet note the conclusion: "But for all practical purposes nobody would know the difference."

What shines through these letters again and again is Flannery O'Connor's wit and realism, her self-knowledge and honesty. Whatever speculations one is tempted to make about the web of life and art, one must not forget the unsentimental detachment from self—even concealment—that was a precondition for her fiction. "You cannot read a story from what you get out of a letter," she said once to a friend; and we should be warned. What we can more certainly get out of her letters is a fund of information dropped by the wayside over the years on the genesis of many a story. And we can learn too of her own real displeasure with several of her works—e.g. "A Stroke of Good Fortune," "The Lame Shall Enter First," Rayber in *The Violent,* even Hazel Motes in *Wise Blood.* (I myself have always had misgivings about the heavy-handedness in these stories and novels. She did too, apparently.) My only criticism of this otherwise splendidly edited and introduced volume, by the way, is that the index does not list all of the references to stories that are made in the text. The casual user should take note.

Flannery O'Connor was glad to be accepted (after years of misinterpretation) as a Catholic writer, along with her friends J. F. Powers, Robert Fitzgerald, Katherine Anne Porter, and Walker Percy. She may have been even gladder to be put in an ad hoc Eccentric Tradition (with Peacock, Firbank, and Murdoch); though she read much and widely during her professional years, she was early affected by Poe's humorous tales—especially the ones dealing with bodily dismemberment—and it shows. But Hawthorne too, she often remarks in these letters, was of momentous importance to her.

Flannery O'Connor has always been, and will remain, a unique figure in mid-twentieth-century American literature, and her place has been deepened and extended by this mar-

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velous collection of letters. Her vision reaches back to an older view of the relationship between man and matter, and between man and God, and it may eventually be looked back upon as a bridge to a view that might well now be surfacing through the cracks in our civilization—a view in which matter is not despised and degraded, but is rather renewed and somehow made sacred.

Old Friends, Book Ends

THE NABOKOV-WILSON LETTERS. *Edited, annotated, and with an introductory essay by Simon Karlinsky. Harper & Row. $15.*

Reviewed by W. B. SCOTT

"I heard the other day at the Faculty Club (at a meeting of the Entomological Society) the funniest story I have ever heard in my life. I shall enjoy telling it you." Nabokov to Wilson [early January 1944]. (We never learn this story!)

This collection of 264 letters, all that remain of a (presumably) somewhat greater number, has been edited by Professor Simon Karlinsky of Berkeley, whose splendid 1973 volume of selections from Chekhov's letters, dedicated to Nabokov, clearly served as a model. (Some of the letters also appear, in part at least, in Wilson's *Letters on Literature and Politics.*) Out of his wide command of Russian literature and history, Professor Karlinsky supplies an indispensable commentary on the literary, linguistic, and political allusions of the two correspondents. He describes Nabokov's liberal political background (dispelling the legend of the embittered aristocratic émigré) and exposes the myth of the benign Lenin—a myth which Nabokov vainly tried to persuade Wilson to abandon; Wilson was convinced to the end that his friend was indifferent to and ignorant of politics, a conviction strengthened by Nabokov's scorn for socio-economic approaches to literature.

These are not letters for the general reader, whoever he may be and assuming rashly that he enjoys reading letters. They are mostly

W. B. SCOTT is professor of dramatic literature emeritus at Northwestern University and the author of *Chicago Letter and Other Parodies.*

Drawing by Lynn Sue Johnson

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about language and literature and the literary business—that is, getting published and properly paid for it; hard-nosed old hand Wilson was most helpful in these matters to innocent immigrant Nabokov. Even so, throughout most of the two decades (the 1940s and '50s) covered by all but a few of these letters, both distinguished writers seem frequently on their uppers, or close to it, *New Yorker* and other magazine checks and academic jobs notwithstanding. In September 1951 Nabokov is "in awful circumstances. . . . I am underpaid here [at Cornell] in a ridiculous and insulting manner." By return mail Wilson tops him: "You can't be any more broke than I am—I have never been so badly in debt in my life."

The anecdotal human-interest kind of detail is in rather short supply, although we have a comforting sense of wives and children and of happy get-togethers, these less frequent than both sides would have liked. One could draw up a touching catalogue of urgent invitations that had to be refused, of meetings planned that never came off. With one letter Nabokov returns, with thanks, a pair of socks borrowed from Wilson and mended by Véra Nabokov as they had been mended earlier by Mary McCarthy Wilson. "You need not have bothered," Wilson generously replies. Surely those socks belong in a museum. Or a reliquary.

There are passing comments, with touches of malice, on friends and others, and Nabokov entertains Wilson with amusing snapshots of people run across on his lecture tours—the lady drama teacher all too conscious of her resemblance to the Duchess of Windsor; the dull fellow encountered in a hotel late in the evening who turns out to be not dull after all but a fellow moth collector; the southern college president, "a most tremendous gentleman, as egocentrical as I."

They skirmish briefly in January 1945 about whether it is possible to have sexual intercourse on the *floor* (italics Wilson's) of a taxicab. Wilson had come across this detail in Nabokov's early Russian novel *Mashenka*, and peremptorily challenged it: "I don't think you can have had any experience of this kind or you would know it is not done that way." This is vintage Wilson in tone, suggestive of his most formidable thundering. But Nabokov, pointing out that his novel referred to *German* taxis of 1920, cites various witnesses and a story told by a White Russian taxi-driver friend (a poet in the bargain) whose two elegant passengers, when he "briskly opened the door for them," shot out "*in copula.*"

This sort of detail is scarce, alas. As mentioned above, the letters are mainly about publishing and being paid for it, language and literature—in Russian and English, with brief excursions that take in French or exclude German. Wilson does not want to review Mann's latest Joseph book, which hangs over his head "like a cloud of dough"; for Nabokov the eminent German is merely "that quack Mann." Both loved Pushkin, and the letters have a great deal about him, with occasional friendly disagreements. The letters of the later 1950s touch upon Nabokov's long-time absorption in his translation of *Eugene Onegin* and his commentary, but there is of course no hint that the friendship will come to grief over their beloved poet, with the publication, in July 1965, of Wilson's massive put-down of this work—out of "pompous aplomb and peevish ignorance," Nabokov scornfully retorted.

Wilson's wide-ranging reading, his curious-mindedness and varied literary sympathies, are in sharp contrast in this correspondence with Nabokov's rather haughty exclusiveness. They agree in disliking Fielding, Thomas Mann, Colette, perhaps a few others; Wilson cannot understand Nabokov's fondness for Stevenson, is successful in persuading him to look again, and more favorably, at Jane Austen. But his missionary attempts to win his friend to Henry James ("that pale porpoise," Nabokov calls him), Malraux, and Faulkner are ruthlessly shot down. Cervantes and Dostoevsky share a single brief fatal sentence. In a bread-and-butter letter following a visit to the Nabokovs (August 1955), Wilson amiably recalls, among other features of his stay, "Volodya's discovery of the worthlessness of Stendhal." On the same day he described this visit in a letter to Helen Muchnic, and mentioned Nabokov's "discovery." It must have rankled—ten years later, in the *Onegin* review, he commented laconically in passing that "Stendhal's unadorned style is as much 'a part of his act' as Nabokov's Fabergé fan-

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ciness"—a sentiment acceptable enough to anyone who loves not Nabokov less, perhaps, but Stendhal more.

Wilson's exuberant and highly productive, if sometimes fumbling, romance with Russian, Nabokov's successful "adultery" with English are pervasive concerns in their letters. They squabble stubbornly and at great length about Russian and English prosody (Professor Karlinsky straightens out both). Wilson raises questions (also helpfully dealt with by Karlinsky) about matters of grammar and usage; he seems oddly innocent-minded for one at home in many languages when he grumbles serio-jocosely about the "anomalies" and "absurdities" of Russian, as if there were some model to which all languages must conform.

Nabokov brought to the United States in 1940 a lifelong acquaintance with English, and the English of his letters early and late is fluent and lively, frequently playful—a nice balance to Wilson's more matter-of-fact prose, the epistolary double of that cool, unhurried, unyielding plain style, inimitable and unparodiable, into which Wilson seemed able to fit everything and which, right or wrong, gives the impression of carrying all before it. But Nabokov had been for many years a prolific Russian writer, and an early letter suggests a slight between-two-worlds feeling: "I have had no regular intercourse with my Russian muse and I am too old to change Conradically (this is a *good* one). . . ." (Wilson had chided him for his punning.) Still, change he did, and the time came when he resented Wilson's placing him below Conrad: "Conrad knew how to handle *ready-made* English, but I know better the other kind." A few months later Wilson conceded that the English of *Conclusive Evidence* (*Speak, Memory*) "has qualities that Conrad could never have managed." In a letter describing a lepidopteral experiment Nabokov calls writing it up "a wonderful bit of training in the use of our (if I may say so) wise, precise, plastic, beautiful English language."

There is much about lepidoptera; "Wars pass, bugs stay," Nabokov writes. He discusses his butterflies and moths with scientific precision, poetic intensity; sends Wilson technical papers which are indulgently received if not understood. There are careful

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instructions for luring moths: " . . . one of the most perfect pleasures I know of—to open a window wide on a muggy night and let them come in." Or butterfly expeditions pay off in other ways. In September 1951, writing from Ithaca, he recalls the summer just past in Telluride, Colorado, where from high above the town "all you hear are the voices of children playing in the streets—delightful!" This memory is worked into the fine paragraph just before the end of *Lolita* in which Humbert Humbert comes to see the real horror of what he has done to his nymphet, as he too listens from high above to "the sounds of children at play, nothing but that":

> I stood listening to that musical vibration from my lofty slope, to the flashes of separate voices with a kind of demure murmur for background, and then I knew that the hopelessly poignant thing was not Lolita's absence from my side, but the absence of her voice from that concord.

Commenting on each other's writings, as both men frequently do, they are sometimes admiring, sometimes not, but always frank. "This is not a case of 'The cuckoo praises the rooster,' " Nabokov tells his friend after warmly praising a new collection of Wilson's prose and verse. The allusion is to a delicious brief fable of 1842 by Ivan Krylov, in which the cuckoo and the rooster exchange extravagant laudations of each other's singing, until the sparrow interrupts to tell them bluntly that all their music is bad!

Wilson greatly admired the early *Real Life of Sebastian Knight,* the late *Pnin,* much in between, but did not care for *Lolita,* which he read in manuscript and found "too absurd to be horrible and tragic, yet . . . too unpleasant to be funny." With his comment he enclosed a largely unfavorable one by his former wife Mary McCarthy. On the same date his wife, Elena, wrote in perceptive praise of *Lolita,* but added, "Unfortunately, my opinion is very unimportant."

Almost a year later (24 November 1955) Nabokov wrote rather sadly (the Olympia Press *Lolita* was out by then):

> It depresses me to think that this pure and austere work may be treated by some flippant critic as a pornographic stunt. The danger is the more real since I realize that *even* you neither understand nor wish to understand the texture of this intricate and unusual production.

This is most interesting, but of course it was not the end. The fifties wore on, the letters continued, friendship survived, although perhaps not with quite the affectionate warmth of old. *Lolita* swept the world, helping in its "pure and austere" way to open the age in which ericas jong and sidneys sheldon. Well-heeled Nabokov could finally say goodbye to what in one letter he calls "udder-conscious and udderly-boring Cornell." (Elsewhere than in these letters he spoke much more affectionately about Cornell and his teaching there; perhaps he played up a little to Wilson's well-known anti-academic bias. "It is always a relief, as you know, to get away from an academic community," Wilson writes in May 1953, as he heads back to Wellfleet after doing time at Princeton, presumably with some Old Nassovian loot to help ease the remembered pain.)

The early sixties offer three letters; there are flashes of the old spirit. Wilson praises *Zazie dans le Métro* but, true to himself, deplores "the whimsical vein that has somehow got into French literature." "Yes," Nabokov answers, true to *himself,* "I admire greatly ZAZIE DANS LE METRO, it is quite a masterpiece in its 'whimsical' genre. (Isnt all art whimsical, from Shakespeare to Joyce?)"

A fair exchange to end with.

Bad Trip

PROVENCE. *By Ford Madox Ford. Ecco. Paper, $6.95.*

Reviewed by JAMES LORD

Forty years dead, Ford Madox Ford has achieved a modicum of immortality as the author of *Parade's End* and *The Good Soldier.*

By some of those who knew him Ford was regarded with esteem as one who cared seriously for literature and labored selflessly in its service—a man, moreover, valued for his sympathy and understanding. At the same time, and often by the same people, he was

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seen as a pretentious, garrulous, mendacious arriviste who sought to foist upon the world a meretricious image of himself as a thinker and creator of enduring importance. Both of these views appear to have approximated the truth; and while the former may prompt a critic's compassion, the latter provides for his contempt. Unfortunately it was this latter aspect of his persona which Ford placed flagrantly before the reader in the volume entitled *Provence,* now reissued in a series called Neglected Books of the 20th Century. Why this book was neglected is easy to see; why it has been exhumed is impossible to imagine. To write about it is bothersome and embarrassing, because any conscientious critic would rather add one pebble to a pantheon than put up a pillory.

Provence, comprising the larger part of southern France, is one of the fairest areas of Europe, a region of blinding sunlight, murky passions, and radiant landscapes. Much traveled and fought over since neolithic times, it would lend itself ideally to imaginative transliteration by a serious geographer of the human spirit. Paul Cézanne, a true son of Provence, achieved such transliteration with supreme grandeur in his paintings. Ford Madox Ford envisioned some vaguely comparable achievement with this book. "Provence is not a country nor the home of a race," he wrote, "but a frame of mind." That is all very well, so long as the frame fits the meaning of the country and the mind contains an understanding of the race. But both mind and frame in Ford's case were gimcrack articles brought south by a bumptious trafficker in shoddy self-esteem.

Ford pleased to think of himself as a practiced traveler of the Great Trade Route which had long ago purveyed the spores of civilization, as well as cloves and calico, to the colorless, tasteless north "from which comes all evil," but where, as a matter of historical fact, the culture Ford prized, and of which he was a product, eked out its precarious existence for several centuries. Many more mountebanks than monks must have mixed in the motley traffic on that route. Ford, however, fatuously fancied himself a merchant prince in the civilizing commerce of ethics and ideas. "The novelist and the honest man on their travels," he wrote,

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"have serious missions; they desire to make acquaintance with the truth." A commendable aspiration, of course, but the one who undertakes so serious a mission must first make acquaintance with himself, and for that dramatic, intimidating, exacting confrontation Ford had neither appetite nor aptitude.

The author advertised himself as a poet, a historian, a prophet, and above all as a moralist. He posed and postured, proclaimed his own clairvoyance, pointed out the errors of others, and passed judgment on "the insupportable madhouse for apes that is our civilization." No digression was too circuitous to be pursued in the exercise of his whimsy, no fact too incontrovertible to be challenged by his conceit, no opinion too outlandish to be flaunted as common sense—for example, "The British farmer is rather a loathsome ignoramus." He hedged his bets by insinuating that maybe, after all, he was only trying to be funny, but no matter how cavernous the cheek or extensive the tongue, we are not amused. As a moralist, Ford made things especially easy for himself. "If you are a moralist," he asserted, "you will want to distort truths so you do not need to see them." One may wonder, then, what you do need to see, especially if you desire to make acquaintance with the truth, but Ford proceeded blithely from that assertion to define the deportment appropriate in Provençal cafés. His quirkiest quiddities appeared to him as momentous revelations of the modern psyche. Preparation and consumption of food, for example, loomed hugely in the world view of a man for whom eating was virtually a mystical experience—he weighed 250 pounds—and the reader is invited to extrapolate the degradation of contemporary culture from the author's mortification as he stood vomiting in the shadow of the Casino at Monte Carlo because his seven-course dinner had come mainly from cans.

It is all quite preposterous and pathetic, a bit like watching through a peephole while a broken-down old buffoon mumbles the mad scene from *King Lear* all alone in a theater that has been closed for forty years. Even for such a melancholy view, however, Ford prepared in advance a glib rejoinder, which is prudently delivered on the eighth page of this book: "It is proper that the good should be defamed by people like reviewers."

As for Provence, that fair land proved to be a topographical representation of the author's incommensurable ego. His descriptions of people, places, events were calculated principally to illustrate and vindicate his ludicrous concept of himself as a kindhearted, crotchety, epicurean sage. He patently knew very little about Provençal life as it is lived by the people of Provence rather than by vacationing refugees from the abominable north. To be sure, in the role of historian Ford delivered himself of turgid discussions on the Provençal past, replete with names, dates, and sociological claptrap. Facts flowed from his pen like sludge, and through the cumulative mire the weary reader toils with increasing resentment, while Ford rambles on and on over his imaginary Great Trade Route. That highway was reserved exclusively for the one-way traffic of the author's pride, and he mapped many an untoward turn in the direction of his grandiloquent goal. He never got there, of course. Winded by a lifetime spent running after his betters, and wearied by protesting too much that his motives were pure, he lacked the stamina and courage to stay the course in the real world.

The symbolic and moral climax of Ford's Provençal fantasy is a dithyramb in praise of bullfighting. A connoisseur of slaughter, he was not interested in the nonlethal kind of fight favored all over Provence. He preferred the pure epiphany of the kill, Spanish style, and appreciated all the nuances of intellectual and spiritual transcendence inherent in the public spectacle of a dumb animal being done to death. The reader is informed that appreciation of such a spectacle will make him "a better man," and that to think as Ford Madox Ford thought, to feel as he felt, under those circumstances will provide exactly the same satisfaction as contemplating a masterpiece by Cézanne. That is obscene and odious nonsense. It is welcome, nonetheless, for it comes as irrefutable confirmation that Ford was devoid of intellectual distinction but replete with spiritual vulgarity.

The final image of the book suggests what the reader may have somberly suspected all along: that the whole enterprise was from the

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beginning primarily a matter of money. On page 2 Ford stated that he was "careful of commercial morality." Five pages further along he observed, "The safest road to fame and fortune is that of the moralist." On the book's penultimate page the contents of his wallet are wafted by a high wind into the Rhone River. The obvious moral is that what Provence has taken away Provence shall be made to restore. Though he had not meant to write anything for a year or two, the incorrigible author immediately set to work, and the frame of mind, after all, which we most perceive in *Provence* is the prolix expectation of profit. It can't have taken long to compose this catchpenny hodgepodge of jejune verbosity and trashy thinking. Moreover, Ford got his money back because—*mirabile dictu*—the original edition of *Provence* sold nearly four thousand copies. In his final sentence, the soon-to-be-reimbursed but disingenuous author muses, "Perhaps the remorseless Destiny of Provence desires thus to afflict the world with my books."

Well, it *is* an affliction, to be sure. But in all fairness to Ford one must bear in mind that very early in this book he clearly states, "I don't want our civilization to pull through."

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The Reader Replies

A Cosmic Flow

Despite Jeremy Bernstein's undoubted abilities both as a practicing physicist and a man of letters in the popularization of physics, his philosophical insight leaves something to be desired. His review of Fritjof Capra, titled "A Cosmic Flow" (Winter 1978/79), is disappointing.

Bernstein claims to have read Capra through once and some parts more than once, but his criticisms focus solely on the epilogue and a few illustrations and decorations in the book and neglect to discuss the main body of the text.

Even in his criticism of the section frontispiece titled "the parallels," Bernstein seems to think the parallel consists solely of the typefaces of the Sanskrit message and the chiral algebra equations. Capra was presumably suggesting a parallel in message, not in medium.

The main sentence Bernstein rips out of context and belabors with his somewhat crude, conceptual apparatus is Capra's claim that there are parallels "beyond a doubt" between physics and Eastern mysticism. Bernstein neglects at least two denials by Capra in the body of the text that Capra is claiming to "prove" Eastern philosophy with modern physics.

Bernstein leaps illogically from the claim that parallels exist to the claim that if parallels exist then a physical experiment could disprove Eastern philosophy. In the last twenty years philosophers and historians of science have discussed numerous relationships between philosophy and science which are not those of strict logical entailment. A philosophy, Eastern or otherwise, can inspire, suggest, or function as a presupposition of a scientific theory without logically entailing the theory. To deny that a physics experiment could disprove a philosophical framework is not to deny all relationship between philosophy and physics.

Bernstein's argument disproves too much. In order to exorcise the specter of Eastern philosophy he is forced to deny *any* connection between philosophy and physics. He himself must be aware that physicists such as Bohr, Heisenberg, and Schrödinger did think physics were related to philosophy (indeed Schrödinger thought yogic philosophy had something to contribute).

Bernstein tars Capra with guilt-by-free-association in mentioning that Nazis and Communists thought philosophy had something to do with physics. But rather than making the logical and historical error of denying any connection between philosophy and physics whatsoever, it might be more valuable to do a careful analysis of the influences of philosophy on physics and vice versa.

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Department of Philosophy

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Jeremy Bernstein replies: I agree with the good doctors from New Hampshire to the extent that I think that it would be a good idea to do a careful analysis of the interrelations—real and imaginary—between physics and philosophy. I do not think that Capra's fatuous and superficial book is a suitable context. I, for one, and despite some occasional musings on the part of some of my colleagues, do not think that there is the slightest connection between Oriental mysticism and modern physics. I do not really know what Capra thinks, since he contradicts himself throughout his book. The danger with this book—and with Gary Zukav's *The Dancing Wu Li Masters*—is that the non-scientist reader can be lured into thinking that he (or she) is in the presence of some significant revelation and one that is endorsed by reputable scientists. Yogic-shmogic—don't be fooled.

In and Around Books

Aristides' recent excursion in and around books (Summer 1979) reminds me of the antecedents of what he calls the "accessories."

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Take, for example, the publisher's blurb on the dust-jacket. Printed books were originally sold in bound quires—no covers, no dust wrappers. Nevertheless, enterprising printers soon found a convenient space for extolling their wares. Thus Copernicus's *De revolutionibus*, the greatest astronomical book of the sixteenth century, bears in the middle of its title page a publisher's exhortation advising the zealous reader that he can find therein the most expeditious tables for calculating the places of the planets in the past or the future. The blurb concludes with a rousing finale: *Igitur eme, lege, fruere*—"therefore buy, read, benefit."

The title page itself had to be invented by the early printers. Originally printed Latin books imitated manuscripts, which were identified not by title but by their first lines or "incipits." At the end came the explicit, generally giving the date and place of copying. The first printers to move their names and date to the front were Bernard Pistor, Peter Loflein, and Erhard Ratdolt in their *Kalendarium* of 1476; this is considered the first title page even though they embedded the title within a long poem.

Aristides remarked, apparently in a moment of mental distraction, that signing the introduction of a book with a date and place is fairly new. I suspect it is actually a holdover from the medieval explicit. In a random check of my shelves, I promptly found a preface dated Vienna, May 1, 1514. Not only that, but at the beginning is a conspicuous list of other works by the author!

Owen Gingerich
Harvard-Smithsonian Center
for Astrophysics
Cambridge, Massachusetts

* * *

I was interested to see Aristides admit to peeking in the index of books in his field to see if his name was included. I have noted this phenomenon among scholars at book exhibits in many different disciplines. Their browsing is limited almost exclusively to the index and bibliographies of the books they pick up, and their decisions to buy seem to be based on what they find there.

Librarians also buy books, and as far as I can determine, *their* decisions are made on the basis of the copyright page, specifically the Cataloguing in Publication statement, which in turn is furnished by the Library of Congress on the basis of the title page, table of contents, and an abstract of the book supplied by the publishers.

Book salesmen, on the other hand, generally show bookstore buyers only the jackets of their new books and bookstores make decisions on that basis. A while back Robert Halsband suggested in *Scholarly Publishing* that authors send friends and colleagues to whom they are obligated only the jackets of their new books, thus sparing themselves considerable expense and their friends and colleagues the necessity of writing elaborate thank-you letters, to say nothing of the task of having to read the books.

All this has vast implications for publishers, particularly in these days of spiraling production costs. Is it really necessary for skilled copy editors to spend weeks or months adjusting authors' syntax and footnotes and engage in all the concomitant correspondence that thus ensues? Why pay expensive typesetters to transform reams of bad typing into neatly justified lines of Times Roman in the central portion of the book? Consider the proofreading time saved. And if we skip that nonessential central portion, think of the ecological benefits of all that unused wood pulp!

In short, why shouldn't a book consist only of what the book buyer considers essential—title page, copyright page (with Cataloguing in Publication information), and table of contents for the librarians; bibliography and index for the scholars; jackets for the bookstores and authors? (I suppose dedication and acknowledgments could be included for the author's family and friends, but they would have to be at the author's expense.) The cost of books would come down dramatically, the time it takes to issue a book would shorten appreciably, and the publisher's profit would rise gratifyingly.

I think this is something scholarly publishers should seriously consider, and as soon as I can convince a foundation to support such a study and fund the conversion costs to this new system I'll suggest that some other publisher put it into practice.

Paul H. Rohmann
Director
The Kent State University Press
Kent, Ohio

Alfred North Whitehead

Under the bold heading Teaching, there appeared in The American Scholar (Autumn 1978) an article by Professor Joseph Brennan on Alfred North Whitehead, recounting the author's experiences in a course on Cosmologies taken under Whitehead in 1934–35, with many associated comments about other aspects of Whitehead and his work. Limitations of space, so the editors inform me, preclude any general discussion here of the underlying issues, despite their importance.

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Accordingly, I confine myself to two features of the article itself.

First, Whitehead, a many-sided thinker, wrote extensively about education and the function of teaching, the *Aims of Education* being probably his best known work in this area, and widely influential. One would have supposed that any serious account of Whitehead as *teacher* would have taken some note of his writings in this field, if only for the light they shed on his own objectives and methods. Yet they are not even mentioned. The omission has significant consequences.

Whitehead specially deplored "inert ideas," by which he meant bits of information, including bits of scholarly information, passively absorbed by the student without being thrown into new contexts and fresh relationships. He attacked thinking in grooves. He stressed the need to combine intellectual discipline with active imagination. Accordingly, he was not greatly interested in, nor very effective with, students who came only to lectures to sit, listen, and take down supposed words of wisdom in their notes. (Our author tells us that he used speed writing so as not to miss anything.) Wishing to stimulate imagination, Whitehead was at his best with students who came to him informally on a personal basis, as Bertrand Russell had done many years before. Hence his weekly teas (which Professor Brennan was too "terrified" to attend despite his impression of Whitehead's notable and uniform kindliness). Hence also his extreme tolerance for student papers that showed signs of imagination or originality, however misguided, and his mild acceptance of student criticisms of his own assertions. If he carried these tendencies inordinately far, there was at least a definite theory behind them. (Professor Brennan seems to have detected only fumbling diffidence.) That his lectures were often disorganized and usually obscure is certainly true, as Professor Brennan rightly notes. But it is important to note also that he disliked formal lecturing and that his use of unconventional and difficult terminology was due largely to his fear of what Justice Holmes called "delusive exactness," and also to his conviction that conventionally minded philosophers who stressed the cardinal importance of rigor and clarity were often deficient in rigor and clarity *about* the nature of "rigor" and "clarity" and inclined to be loose in their thinking and writing outside their accustomed grooves. Whether he was right or wrong here is not, for present purposes, important. The point is that there is no occasion to postulate some elusive "Other Whitehead" behind the benign exterior (as Professor Brennan suggests). The simple fact is—as Whitehead often stressed—that *all* our observings are selective; we habitually fail to notice much of what is before us if we are not prepared to see it.

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If Professor Brennan had considered Whitehead's writings on teaching, either at the time he took the course or retrospectively, his angle of vision would surely have been broader.

The second point concerns the subject taught—in this case *cosmology*, which involves a philosophical inquiry into our most general and most basic ways of thinking about the world, our place in it, and our knowledge of it. Like *philosophy of science*, cosmology is a second-order discipline, since it criticizes and assesses scientific thinking, but it is broader in scope, since it includes a critique of humanistic thinking as well. It is different from (though concerned about) *pure science* and still further removed from *applied science* and *technology*. Whitehead, who came to cosmology from mathematics, mathematical logic, and mathematical physics, was fully aware of these distinctions—distinctions to which, as Sir Charles Snow pointed out bitingly in *The Two Cultures*, many academic and literary humanists are *tone-deaf*. Indeed, Whitehead was impelled toward cosmology by his conviction that even our simplest reports of observed "facts" rest upon unexamined cosmological assumptions. He was one of the first thinkers in our day to see the need to bridge the gap between scientific thinking and humanistic thinking and to propose a solution, which, in his case, took the form of a radical reconstruction in our most fundamental concepts and categories. Others are at long last coming to see the problem—addressing it, however, in less radical and drastic ways.

Professor Brennan, however, seems unaware of the problem, of Whitehead's objectives, and—what is more relevant here—of the scope of *cosmology* as an academic topic. Mindful of Whitehead's shrewd observation that the tacit assumptions and predispositions of any work are usually slipped in at the start, we may examine the opening paragraph of the present article:

> "In ten thousand years, men may go to the moon," the lecturer said. His topic was cosmology; the audience, a Harvard philosophy class. The lecturer was competent: he was Whitehead. True, his estimate erred a bit on the conservative side. Less than thirty-five years after that class meeting, two American astronauts walked on the moon.

But what is the force of the initially quoted sentence? It might taken as a casual speculation. It might be an assertion, in figurative terms, that space travel was a *theoretical* possibility in the uncertain future. Either interpretation would fit a lecture on *cosmology*. But on this footing, subsequent events would tend rather to confirm than discredit the suggestion; at least no adverse inferences could be drawn. To make a point against the lecturer, so as to catch the reader's attention, the

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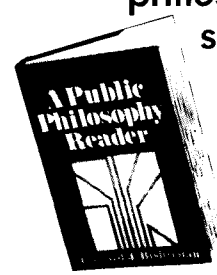

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author has to ignore such possibilities (as he does) and treat the sentence as an "estimate" (he so describes it) of the probable time needed for the development of rocketry and space navigation which were then barely conceivable. But to take the sentence in this way is to take us out of *cosmology*, the field in which Whitehead was "competent," into the area of *applied science* and *technology*. Technical predictions have no normal place in cosmology; conversely, "competence" in cosmology does not imply "competence" in engineering or technological forecasting. Something has slipped here. It looks as if the writer had deceived himself about the scope of *cosmology*.

Later one encounters a further confusion of issues:

> Today we can see that he overdid his anti-Newtonian polemic. Newton's laws helped put those men on the moon whose landing Whitehead did not expect for millennia. Recent work by neo-Newtonian philosophers tends to show that relativity theory enables us to dispense with some types of absolute motion but not all.

But relativity theory belongs to *theoretical physics*, or so I had always supposed. Whitehead's chief *cosmological* objection to Newton's view of the universe was not that his laws were limited in application, but that they had been formulated in terms of material *bodies* and *objects* rather than in terms of *processes* or successions of *events* and what he called *actual occasions*. In this aspect, Whitehead's *cosmological* views seem to have proved quite compatible with Heisenberg's version of quantum theory (which Einstein rejected on the ground that God does not play dice) and are wholly unaffected by the success of the moon landing. Different questions are involved.

In short, Professor Brennan appears to have misapprehended the topic as well as the teacher.

PHILIP H. RHINELANDER
Stanford University

Album of Suicides

Stanley Kauffmann, in his reminisence "Album of Suicides" (Summer 1979), attributes the phrase "let him do his business" to Nan Talbot. Praise is due to Mr. Kauffmann for his fairness in accurately rendering the phrase—after so long—so that it is easily recognizable, but, historically the phrase can be traced to Sir Richard Burton and found in his translation of *The Perfumed Garden* of the Shaykh Nefwazi where it is applied in a similar context.

DAVID MORTON
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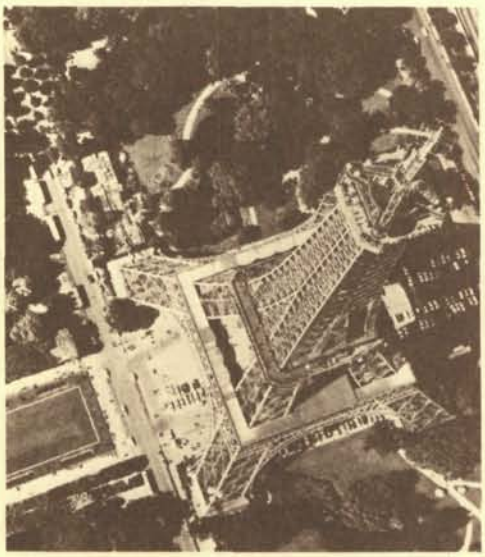

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